

THE WORLD'S **NUMBER ONE** SCI-FI, FANTASY & HORROR MAG!

SEX

333

THIS IS THE WAY...
...to all the latest on
SEASON TWO of the
Star Wars spin-off

THE MANDALORIAN

Behind-the-scenes
on the making of the
show, plus hints at
what's in store!

EXCLUSIVE!

**GET YOUR
FREAK ON**

Blumhouse's new horror
flick is a Freaky Friday
The 13th mash-up

PLUS!

HIS DARK MATERIALS

DALEKS!

THE WALKING DEAD

STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

AND! TRUTH SEEKERS | ANIMANIACS | DUNE | THUNDERBIRDS | STAR TREK | WARHAMMER | LOCKE & KEY | FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR

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Never mind the Morlocks as we celebrate high-concept comedy *G Vs E*.

First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!



DEAD ON ITS FEET

Robert Graham, email Do we really need any more *Walking Dead* spin-offs? The original series is up among the all-time great horror shows and *Fear The Walking Dead* took it in an interesting new direction. *Walking Dead: World Beyond* seems like the same old, same old, and anything else will only appeal to *Walking Dead* fans (*The Walking Dead* and *Fear The Walking Dead* are even more ruthless with their main characters than *Game Of Thrones*, though). It might well be time for *The Walking Dead* to take a rest, at least as a TV franchise.

SFX Anyone else agree with Robert? Are we thoroughly zombied-out, or is there life in the old reanimated corpse yet? Let us know.



SFX It's never fun writing obituaries for your heroes. At least we can enjoy Diana Rigg's brilliance on screen for years to come.

OH MR FRODO SIR!

Edward O'Reilly, email Just a slight correction to Owen Carpenter's tribute to Ian Holm (First Contact, *SFX* 332): it was actually Frodo he played in the BBC adaptation of *The Lord of The Rings*. He played Bilbo in the movie version. Sir Ian, we bid you a fond farewell.

Thanks for the tribute to Diana Rigg. She did indeed embody the spirit of the '60s and when she died at the end of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, it felt as if the '60s had died with her.



The Haunting Of Bly Manor: I've watched scarier episodes of *Scooby Doo...* those pesky kids!

Sue Stevens



Let's have Mark Hamill feature in a proper cohesive Luke Skywalker story, back with Harrison Ford and like the old times.

@TheOnlyMarky

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"It'll just be a load of massive tonsils on legs"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the SFX hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ *The Haunting Of Bly Manor* was perfectly splendid – much better than *Hill House*.
→ The trailer for *Daleks!* looks brilliant. What an unexpected pleasure!
→ Thank goodness *Star Trek: Discovery* is back. Those opening moments! Fantastic.

RANTS

→ People – particularly “fans” of franchises – repeatedly being negative online about shows and films. Why not just stick to something you enjoy instead?

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ I *really* want the new *Dawn Of The Dead* box set – especially the library music CDs.
→ Forthcoming Vampiria book *Glamour Ghoul* looks interesting – written by the niece of the '50s horror host, and drawing on her diaries.
→ Looking forward to Shudder doc *Leap Of Faith: William Friedkin On The Exorcist* (due 19 November).

RANTS

→ Can't begin to imagine why you'd watch 12 hours of stuff like Jude Law digging a hole...

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ If film companies don't start releasing at least some of their big tentpole titles in cinemas soon there won't be anywhere left to show them. So sad!

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

→ Actually, Ian, the *Third Day* live event you dissed was astounding technically and genuinely mesmerising. Kudos to Sky/HBO for taking it on and Punchdrunk for pulling it off.
→ Watched (and loved) the sumptuous *Koko-Di Koko-Da*, but that tune has been lodged in my head for *days* now.

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

→ Intrigued by these rumours of Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield turning up in the next Spider-Man movie. Any chance of Nicholas Hammond, Lou Ferrigno and Peter Hooten while you're about it?
→ Check out Defunctland's fascinating documentary on Walt Disney's original vision for Epcot as a 1960s city of tomorrow. It's on YouTube: bit.ly/epcotdoc.

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ For the old-school *Animaniacs* fans worried about the quality of the return: don't be. It's biting, hilarious and silly as ever, with the satire we need right now.
→ A truly unexpected pleasure is Brian Duffield's teen-exploding movie *Spontaneous*, starring Katherine Langford (*Cursed*). Funny, jarring and emotionally gutting. Find this gem.

RANTS

→ The announcement that *Dexter* is coming back, after limping miserably to its series finale in 2013: haven't we suffered enough, 2020?

WELCOME

"Witches work only with magic!"

Captain's Log



I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU...

Last month we asked if Bond could defeat Covid-19. Turns out he can't, and the fallout from that has had a knock-on effect with theatrical cinema releases. You know all this, of course, but it's probably worth mentioning that – Bond aside – quite a few films that were destined for the big screen are now heading to streaming services near you. This means we often miss the opportunity to dig a little deeper into movies like *The Craft: Legacy* and *The Witches*, sadly. It also means that our deputy editor Ian is being kept on his toes with the reviews section.

That said, there are still quite a few releases making their way to the cinemas that remain open, so it's good to support them where you feel able to do so. Not only that, but there's an avalanche of new books, comics and TV shows heading our way over the coming winter months. I don't know about you, but I definitely feel ready to hibernate and hope for better times (and places). I hope you're doing well and taking care of yourself, and others, if possible.

Things can be a bit glum at the moment – an understatement, I know – but we're lucky we can lose ourselves in other worlds, other universes, until this one feels like it's ready to rejoin properly. Hopefully you can lose yourself in *SFX* every month, like I do. We may not have Bond quite yet, but I'd like to think we've still got something for all of you.

See you back here in four weeks – stay safe!

Darren
X

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DECEMBER 2020



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

08 Animaniacs

Rebooted and ready to take on 2020

Highlights



10 DUNE

→ Spice up your life with a series of new comic adventures while you wait for the film to be released.



12 WARHAMMER 40,000

→ Kieron Gillen on bringing the unending battle-bastards to Marvel Comics.



14 LEGO STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

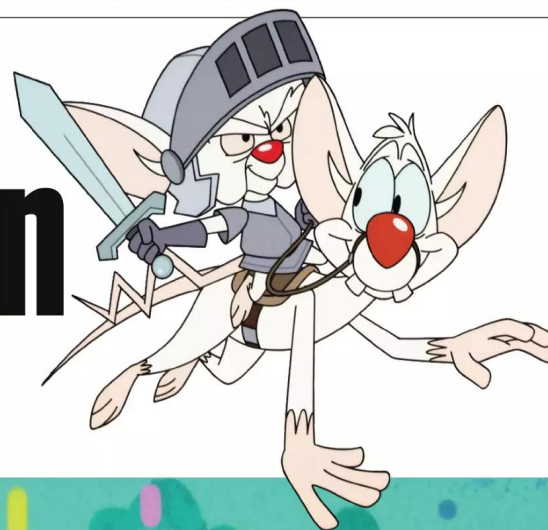
→ Not the one you were expecting... fortunately enough.

► **SCI-FACT!** New *Animaniacs* songs were recorded in the Eastwood Studio where Carl Stalling recorded the original *Looney Tunes* music in the '40s.

SHOWRUNNERS EXCLUSIVE

Talk Of The Toon

The Warner Brothers and Warner sister, Dot, return to lighten the mood in the **Animaniacs** revival



WHEN THE STEVEN SPIELBERG-produced *Animaniacs* series vamoosed into the sunset in 1998, there were 99 episodes comprising 274 segments, featuring a host of beloved original characters including Slappy Squirrel, the Goodfeathers, Rita and Runt, Pinky and the Brain, and the show's superstars: the Warner siblings Yakko, Wakko and Dot.

Twenty-two years later, the series is back with 13 new episodes under Spielberg's guiding hand and almost all of the original voice cast reprising the Warners and Pinky and the Brain, in new adventures from showrunner Wellesley Wild (*Family Guy*) and co-producer Gabe Swarr (*El Tigre*), who is leading the design and animation.

The show's return is the kind of nostalgic resurrection the Warner siblings would have mocked back in the day. Happily, the animated trio meet the moment by mercilessly lampooning their return in their first episode back, and even more in their slightly tweaked theme song. "The changes we made to the opening reflect and project what the show is, and what we want the show to be," Wild tells Red Alert. "It gives people an idea of 'this is what you're in for': we're going to be self-aware, there is going to be meta-humour – all the things that you like, but it's just newer."

Faithfully modernising that *Animaniacs* cheek, sass and rapid-fire satire for the 21st century was a bit intimidating for series newcomers Wild and Swarr. As such, Wild admits they approached it all very delicately. "It was such a beloved show with a rabid fanbase, and boy, are they going to let us know if they're not happy," Wild chuckles. "And getting that lightning in a bottle is so hard in the first place, so we were just trying to keep it in there."

The first area to tackle was the overall look of the show, which Swarr says he approached with a huge blue-sky design phase that even experimented with a more classic Hollywood-era aesthetic. They presented an array of ideas to Spielberg, which Swarr says was "very nerve wracking." He gave them a note not to go too





"It's from Disney... the lawyers are watching."

far from the original. "We went back and studied all the original episodes and looked at what we thought worked and didn't work, narrowing it down to, 'This is the best of the best,'" Swarr explains. "We can't do exactly the original, but we should take advantage of all the great things that you can do in animation now that you couldn't back then."

What that means is that characters now have softer edges and more angular facial expressions, and live against crisp backgrounds that complement the more stylised character looks. "Gabe just did an incredible job of recreating that hand-drawn feel," says Wild.

As for which characters will populate most episodes, he says "We're using the Warners and Pinky and the Brain as our bedrock." As before, each episode will feature three segments, with new characters also being folded in over two seasons. "We're developing a bunch of off-core segments that don't have them. Those are by far the hardest to develop, because Steven is very particular. But it's a variety show and we want as much variety as possible."

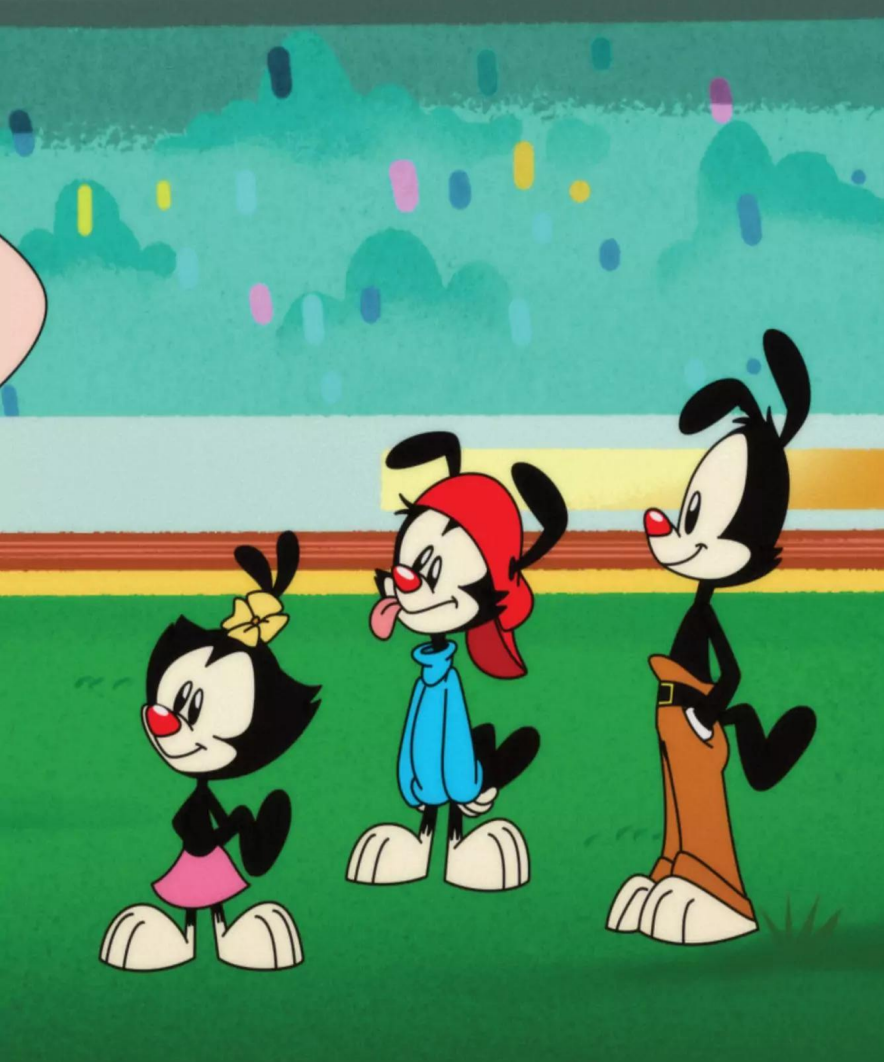
"I gave the writers a list of all of the big events that were coming up in 2020 and 2021"

Pinky and the Brain fans will be thrilled to learn that there are more segments featuring them in this return than in all the original run. "We didn't plan on doing so many Pinky and the Brains," Wild laughs. "But we ended up doing them because I just kept getting good pitches from the writers for episodes. And Rob Paulson [Pinky] and Maurice LaMarche [Brain] are so great and fun to work with. They're bringing so much to it. They came in to record one day, and without having talked to each other before, Maurice was wearing a Pinky shirt and Rob was wearing a Brain shirt."

Last but not least, rapid-fire, pop-culture parody remains an important part of the ethos. Celebs will be roasted and original songs will take down everything from politics to social media. Wild explains "It's really hard to do that when it takes nine to 12 months to make an episode. I gave the writers a list of all of the big events that were coming up in 2020 and 2021, like the Olympics, the election and so on, and we wrote to those as much as possible."

Swarr hopes audiences will be as excited as they are about the new ways they frame their original songs in this revival. "They're by far the hardest thing to do on the show," he says. "But they're also the most rewarding." **TB**

Animaniacs is streaming on Hulu in the US from 20 November. A UK channel/date is TBC.



Nipples the size of babies' dummies are in.

SCI-FACT! After illustrating Marvel's 1984 movie adaptation, Bill Sienkiewicz has returned to draw the cover of *Dune: The Graphic Novel*.



Built On Sand

Brian Herbert and Kevin J Anderson are bringing **Dune** back to comics

→ EVER SINCE RALPH MACCHIO and Bill Sienkiewicz turned David Lynch's 1984 film of Frank Herbert's acclaimed novel into a Marvel mini-series, *Dune* has been absent from the comic book page. But with Denis Villeneuve's new big-screen adaptation due next year, Frank's son Brian Herbert and Kevin J Anderson have not only scripted a 12-issue mini-series of their 1999 prequel novel *House Atreides* for Boom! Studios, but have transformed *Dune* itself into a graphic novel for Abrams Books.

"Comics and the *Dune* canon went in different directions for decades after the 1984

film," says Herbert. "To me, it always felt like something was missing. I wanted to see how the stories in the *Dune* universe – especially my father's great classic – would look in comic book form. Since Frank Herbert wrote visually – he worked as a professional photographer at one time – it was only natural that his books, and the new ones I'm writing with Kevin, should be published as comic books."

"I've been a comics fan most of my life, and Brian and I always think visually when we write our novels, so it seems a natural move to adapt our first *Dune* novel to comic format," adds Anderson. "It's been a lot of fun to

reinterpret the story we wrote over 20 years ago."

Set 35 years before the events of *Dune*, *House Atreides* introduces readers to younger versions of key characters like Duke Leto, Lady Jessica and the Baron Harkonnen. "As *Dune* fans ourselves, Kevin and I wanted to know more about them all," explains Herbert. "So we really enjoyed using my father's notes and the novels he'd already written to flesh out details of this collective backstory."

However, don't expect to see *Dune*'s main protagonist Paul Atreides, who isn't born until towards the end of the *Prelude To Dune* trilogy,

which continued with 2000's *House Harkonnen* before concluding with 2001's *House Corinno*. "While *House Atreides* doesn't have Paul Atreides as a character, fans of *Dune* will recognise not only Leto, Jessica and the Baron, but also Thufir Hawat, Gurney Halleck

and Duncan Idaho, as well as Emperor Shaddam IV and Count Hasimir Fenring," says Anderson.

"These are stories that give all the foundation that fans want to see before *Dune* begins."

Since it was first published in 1965, *Dune* has become one of the most acclaimed SF novels of all time, and Anderson admits that transforming it into a three-volume graphic novel was a daunting prospect. "It was a real challenge to visually interpret Frank Herbert's original classic," admits Anderson. "When he first wrote his novel, he took the time and space he needed to build his world and to immerse us in his politics and philosophy. But the comic format can't be static, so we had to work closely with the artistic team at Abrams to make this a very effective adaptation."

With Raul Allen and Patricia Martin illustrating *Dune* and Dev Pramanik drawing *House Atreides* almost simultaneously, the two artistic teams were able to liaise. "One of the exciting things about both the graphic novel and the comic book series is that the character, costume, setting and ship development were done in tandem," explains Anderson. "Raul Allen and Patricia Martin developed what the characters and equipment look like, we worked closely with them to get the look and feel correct, and Dev Pramanik was able to use the same designs."

Revisiting *House Atreides* was also invaluable research for Herbert and Anderson's latest novel *The Duke Of Caladan* (published by Tor), which opens 12 months before the beginning of *Dune*. "It focuses on Paul when he's 14 years old and growing into



Is this a good character, or a baddie? It's so hard to tell.

manhood, and we put him in situations that cause him to mature quickly," says Herbert. "Later, by the time of *Dune*, he's only 15, but is mature beyond his years. Our newest novel – and the two sequels to it – will explain how Paul Atreides came to be that interesting person, because all three novels take place in the span of a year and lead directly into the events of *Dune*."

Suggesting that *Dune* has proved so enduring because of his late father's prescience in "envisioning scenarios in which people actually now find themselves living," Herbert believes that the time is now right for this to become a franchise that – along with films, novels and comics – also encompasses games and a possible TV series. "It's taken so long for all this to develop because so many other franchises were borrowing from *Dune* and getting their marketing going faster," he reasons. "But now, at long last, *Dune* fans can rejoice, as finally the authentic, beautiful flower of *Dune* is unfolding its petals in front of millions of people, blooming in the desert of Arrakis and the interconnected imperium of planets. It's an exciting time for *Dune* fans, and I only wish my father and mother could have been here to see it." **sj**

Dune: House Atreides #1 and Dune: Duke Of Caladan are out now. Book one of Dune: The Graphic Novel is out on 10 December.



AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Kate Mulgrew reprising *Voyager*'s Captain Janeway in new CG show **Star Trek: Prodigy**.
→ Samuel L. Jackson toplines **Nick Fury** solo series for Disney+.
→ HBO Max ordering 10 episodes of Greg Berlanti's **Green Lantern**, with Seth Grahame-Smith as showrunner.
→ Netflix developing kaiju anime series **Godzilla: Singular Point**.
→ Paddy Considine to star as Viserys Targaryen in *Game Of Thrones* prequel **House Of The Dragon**.
→ Ewan McGregor confirms Disney+'s **Obi-Wan Kenobi** series aims to start filming in March.
→ Netflix developing live-action **Conan The Barbarian** series, by Crom!
→ Marvel casting: newcomer Iman Vellani plays Kamala Khan in **Ms Marvel**.
→ Amazon fast-tracking a spin-off from **The Boys**.
→ **Supergirl** to end after season six while Netflix aborts Mars mission drama **Away** and axes **The Dark Crystal: Age Of Resistance** after just one series. Bloody Skeksis!

► **SCI-FACT!** Gillen got his first pro comics credits on two strips in *Warhammer Monthly*, back in 2003 and 2004.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

On The Warpath

Kieron Gillen is giving it both barrels as he brings **Warhammer 40,000** to Marvel Comics – and takes charge of the **Eternals**

AFTER SPENDING THE PAST TWO years on creator-owned work, Kieron Gillen has been lured back to Marvel by two new projects, as he not only helms the House of Ideas' first *Warhammer 40,000* mini-series *Marneus Calgar*, but also becomes the writer of the latest iteration of the *Eternals*.

"I'm always looking for something I haven't done before," says Gillen, who started out in comics in the late '90s by contributing to *Warhammer Monthly*. "In the case of *Warhammer*, it was setting the tone and direction for Marvel's new line of books and working out how we can tap into Marvel's unparalleled resources to make *Warhammer* comics unlike any that have existed before. It's a big challenge, and I love it."

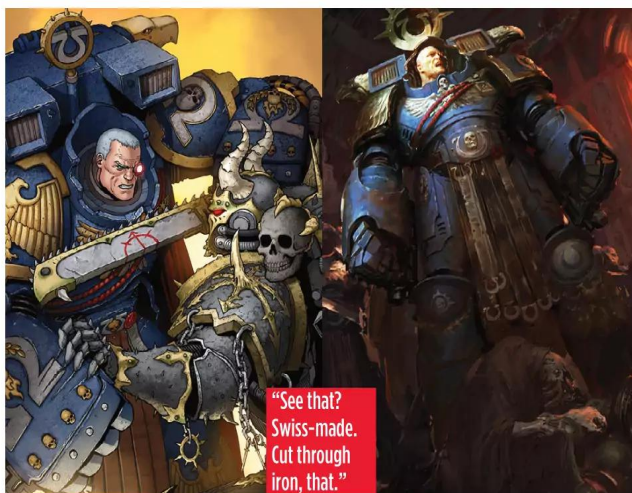
Providing an entry point into the future war-ravaged universe from Games Workshop's tabletop games, the Jacen Burrows-drawn five-part series focuses on ferocious Chapter Master Marneus Calgar. "If you want to explain *Warhammer 40,000*, you have to explain the Imperium, and if you have to explain the Imperium, you have to explain their icon – the not so humble Space Marine," reasons Gillen. "If you want to tell people what Space Marines are, you use the closest we have to a paragon of what it means to be a Space Marine in the grim future where there's only war – and that's Marneus."

The series chronicles Marneus's formative early years in the Space Marines. "Marneus is as if Captain America grew up in Hell, lives in Hell, and fights to sustain Hell," laughs Gillen. "We watch in both excitement and horror. He also has enormous fists with guns attached..."

As a long-time *Warhammer* fan, Gillen is hoping to introduce a few other familiar faces too. "*Warhammer* is, to say the least, big," he points out. "The job for me is focusing and editing – what do people really need to know for this mini to land? That said, I'm working in what I can, as there's certainly lots of bits of Marneus's illustrious career I'd like to nod to. At the very least, I want to see Jacen draw a Tyranid!"

Renowned for packing visceral detail into Avatar Press series such as Alan Moore's *Neonomicon*, Burrows is excelling himself on *Marneus Calgar*. "Jacen is a consummate storyteller," Gillen says. "There are some splash pages where we show a battlefield which are everything that made my teenage metalhead heart explode when I first encountered the first edition of [*Warhammer* handbook] *Rogue Trader* in 1987."

Proclaiming him "a titan of modern fantasy art", Gillen is also enjoying his partnership with *Eternals* artist Esad Ribic. "There isn't a comic artist working today who manages scale like him," he continues. "This means when we





"I dunno about you, but I am knackered."

introduce the key cities of the Eternals, they are instantly resonant, like a first glimpse at Minas Tirith or Barad Dur. It's a series of worlds, hidden in ours. Yet at the same time, this is a book set on Earth, and about Earth. When we skip to New York, and Esad captures it in all its febrile energy, it grounds it."

Gillen has mainly referred to Jack Kirby's original late '70s series, in addition to Neil Gaiman and John Romita Jr's 2006 mini-series. "My aim was to aggressively synthesise everything into a huge mythology," he explains, acknowledging Kirby's original concept for the Eternals as Marvel's answer to Erich von Daniken's *Chariots Of The Gods*.

"They're alien creations, who are mistaken for gods, but when they were transplanted into the Marvel Universe that doesn't quite land as well, due to the *actual* gods traipsing around. So I've dug into the subtext of what Kirby was doing: if the Celestials are gods, and the Eternals are made by them to protect the Earth from the Deviants, who are very much devils, that then makes them angels. And angels – unchanging beings of order – are interesting. There's nothing quite like them in Marvel."

After collectively perishing in 2008's *Avengers* #4, the Eternals have subsequently been resurrected by the Earth. "Eternals death is only a temporary thing, and the civilisation is pulling itself together, so they're feeling better now," says Gillen, who's pitted them against the formidable menace of the Mad Titan himself, Thanos, whose parents were both Eternals.

"When I was doing the grand integration of the Eternals into a single myth, the origins of Thanos just stood out. When you know the full history of the Titan Eternals, he appears ever more a black sheep. He is their Eternal shame. Also, Thanos is one of my faves – the Marvel Byronic villain par excellence. He made sense, so of course I was going to grab him!" **sj**

Warhammer 40,000: Marneus Calgar #1 is out now. *Eternals* #1 is out on 11 November.



SCI-FACT!

The special ties into the 2020 Lego Advent calendar and upcoming *Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga* videogame.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

Bricking It

The **Star Wars Holiday Special** is back – but not as you know it!

➔ WHEREVER YOU LAND ON THE STAR WARS scale of love or hate, there's at least one thing just about everyone can agree on: the 1978 *Star Wars Holiday Special* remains the worst in-canon production of the franchise. A cheesy one-hour special meant to bridge *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, the 20th Century Fox Television-produced tie-in boasted the entire original cast, plus actresses Bea Arthur and Diahann Carroll for some weird reason.

Even with that star power it was bad beyond belief, so much so that actor Anthony Daniels referred to it as a “turd” in his autobiography *I Am C-3PO*. Although never broadcast again, bootlegs have still made it legendary in pop culture history.

Forty-three years later, Lucasfilm clearly hopes there's been time enough for the stink to fade, as it starts anew with the animated *Lego Star Wars Holiday Special* on Disney+ this month. An in-canon continuation of the sequel trilogy's narrative, this special takes place right after the end of *Star Wars: The Rise Of Skywalker*, with a celebration looming for Rey Skywalker and her Resistance pals: Finn, Poe, Chewie, Rose and their various droid companions.

Leaning into the familiar cheeky Lego style of storytelling found in the videogames and big-screen movies, the *Holiday*

Special winks at its predecessor by also setting its story on the Wookiee planet of Kashyyyk, during the celebration of Life Day. But aside from that, says Josh Rimes (Director of Animation and Live Action Series Development at Lucasfilm), there are no more similarities.

“Chewie's extended family is arriving, which might be familiar to the old *Holiday Special*,” Rimes tells *SFX*. “But from there, we went back to watch a lot of the old, classic holiday specials, like the Rankin/Bass ones, and classic holiday films like *Planes, Trains And Automobiles* – even *Home Alone*. And of course, *It's A Wonderful Life* was a huge influence. It's really its own thing, that will hopefully stand on its own and become a perennial special that folks can revisit season to season.”

Some may be surprised to hear that a Lego special is furthering the cinematic canon. James Waugh, Vice President of Franchise Content & Strategy at Lucasfilm, explains that this spiralled out of their team trying to figure out a few things – including what *Lego Star Wars* content was going to look like in the then forthcoming era of Disney+.



It's awkward when your different friends meet.



The slash fiction basically writes itself.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Benedict Cumberbatch capes up as Doctor Strange in **Spider-Man 3**, along with Jamie Foxx as Electro. Multiverse madness ahoj?
→ *Killing Eve*'s Sandra Oh stars in Sam Raimi-produced horror **Umma**.
→ Coronashuffle: **No Time To Die** bumped to 2 April '21, **Dune** to 1 October '21, **The Batman** to 4 March '22, **Jurassic World: Dominion** to 10 June '22.
→ Disney's **Space Mountain** indoor rollercoaster ride now in development as a movie. Mind your heads.
→ Allison Williams stars in Blumhouse AI thriller **M3GAN**.
→ Warner Bros. adapting indie comic book **Black**, set in a USA where only African-Americans possess superpowers.
→ *Crawl* gator-bait Kaya Scodelario and *The Flash*'s Robbie Amell join the **Resident Evil** reboot.
→ Zac Efron starring in new adaptation of Stephen King's inflammable classic **Firestarter**.
→ Legendary developing **Buck Rogers** reboot by *Transformers* producer Don Murphy.



"In this moment of taking a breath and saying, 'This is the end of that long saga that meant so much to us for over 40 years', we asked, 'How do we celebrate that?'" Waugh says. "We've done [Lego] series in the past that are just wonderful, and they're definitely my son's gateway into *Star Wars*. But we thought, 'Okay, we really want to find something that's special and fits the platform.'"

NINE LIVES

Knowing that the timing worked to have this special come out the year after *The Rise Of Skywalker* was released, it all clicked. "We always knew where [the movie] was ending," Waugh reveals. "So, for us, it felt like: for the special, after you've just saved the galaxy, there's nothing you want to do more than have a great Life Day party."

Development for the special happened during the post-production process on *Rise*, so the team worked on locking their script before animation house Atomic Cartoons got to work in Vancouver. Seeking a way to honour the entire Skywalker Saga timeline, they zeroed in on Rey and BB-8 travelling to a Jedi Temple as she seeks more knowledge about her Force abilities. There, she's knocked into a "cross-

timeline adventure" across the *Star Wars* canon, which enables her to meet characters from all nine films, including Luke, Darth Vader, Obi-Wan and more. Many of the franchise's actors are also returning to voice their characters, including Anthony Daniels, the cast from *The Clone Wars*, Kelly Marie Tran (Rose Tico) and Billy Dee Williams (Lando).

"This gave us a great opportunity to celebrate everything in a fun and playful way, and look at *Lego Star Wars* like a kid might play with their own *Star Wars* Lego: by dumping them out, having different characters from different eras playing, with different vehicles battling," Rimes continues. The overall theme grounds the whole story in a celebration of home and family which binds together the entire franchise. "It comes down to the relationship between Finn and Rey at the end of the day."

If *Star Wars* fans accept this holiday offering, Waugh confirms that they hope a new chapter will come sooner than later. "We love the idea of seasonal specials for Lego. We like this format. I think there's a lot of potential here, and it gives us a lot of leeway – but nothing is official yet." **TB**

The Lego Star Wars Holiday Special is streaming on Disney+ from 17 November.



► **SCI-FACT!** When Hill first proposed *Locke & Key* to IDW, he pitched it as being “in the same vein as *Sandman*.”

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Crossing The Dreams

LOCKE & KEY ENJOYED A successful first season on Netflix and a *Sandman* series is currently in production at the streaming giant, and now the two series are meeting on the comic book page this month. Written and drawn by the former's creators Joe Hill and Gabriel Rodriguez, the two-issue crossover begins in *Locke & Key/The Sandman Universe: Hell And Gone* #1 from IDW, before DC returns the compliment with its own one-shot early next year.

Joe Hill talks the stuff that crossovers are made of, as **Locke & Key** meets *Sandman* in *Hell And Gone*

“It’s been something of a winding path to being able to put this out into the world,” admits Hill. “Gabriel Rodriguez – who is my artistic brother – and I are about the same age and love a lot of the same comics, particularly *Sandman*. When I was in my late teens/early twenties, the writers I cared about were the ‘British invasion’ writers who changed comic books, like Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Jamie Delano. They swept in from the UK and showed what was possible in the artform, reinvigorating it and returning comics to their ‘50s horror roots.”

Hell And Gone has been in the works for several years. Hill recalls that “When I began saying that it would be good to do a *Sandman* crossover in 2003, Gabe instantly got excited about that idea. What got me thinking about it specifically was the Hell key. I began to wonder whether Lucifer’s key to Hell had been made out of whispering iron, which comes from *Locke & Key*.”

Locke & Key/The Sandman Universe is preceded by a zero-issue reprint of “Open The Moon” from 2016’s *Guide To The Known Keys*, while recent *Locke & Key* three-parter *In Pale Battalions Go* leads directly into *Hell And Gone*. “One of the things I was asking myself was how we can give this story real emotional impact,” explains Hill. “There was this story I wanted to tell for a while called *In Pale Battalions Go*, which is about World War One. It sets up the stakes for *Hell And Gone* and lays the groundwork for that story.”

Set some time before the events of *Sandman* #1, when Morpheus was a prisoner of the malevolent magician Roderick Burgess, *Hell And Gone* opens with Mary Locke determined to rescue the soul of her late brother Jack, who

is languishing in hell. “I operate with the idea that in the world of *Locke & Key*, there are people who have had brushes with the world of the occult like the Locke family – and one of them is Roderick Burgess, who first trapped Morpheus in 1915,” explains Hill. “It turns out that the Locke family really needs something that Burgess has, and they also have something that he would like, so they have a reason to do business together.”

Along with Death and the Corinthian, expect appearances from Cain and Abel, whose mystical homes perhaps have much in common with the mysterious Keyhouse. “It’s a little bit like as if someone in the Locke family unlocked the door to the Dreaming and could make a grand tour of Morpheus’s world, while in the process of attempting to save someone who needs saving,” reasons Hill. “It’s important to meet Cain and Abel and some of the other key characters who live on the outskirts of the Dreaming – and along the way, we explore some stuff from the original *Sandman* run that was indicated but not actually depicted.”

Admitting that it is “material that has proved tricky to adapt before,” Hill praises *Locke & Key*’s TV showrunner Carlton Cuse for striking the right balance after two previous unsuccessful pilots. “Carlton cracked the problem of finding the right tone of the series,

“I began to wonder whether Lucifer’s key to Hell had been made out of whispering iron”

which in the comic is 50/50 horror/fantasy,” explains Hill. “Given that the protagonists are mostly teenagers, he thought it should be 75% fantasy and 25% horror, and that you’d want to lean into the more *Harry Potter* elements and allow the horror to be more of a subject explored in an almost meta way, rather than being the central focus of the story.”

After co-writing season one’s opener, Hill hopes to script future episodes. Meanwhile, he’s hard at work on his next novel, which seems to have a life of its own. “I’d written two enormous books back to back in *NOS4R2* and *The Fireman*, which were real doorstoppers,” he says. “After that I felt the need to practise economy, so I wrote some short stories and novellas, which were published in *Full Throttle* and *Strange Weather*. I’m now back on my new novel, which is going well, but I’m afraid it’s going to be another *Game Of Thrones*-sized book!” **JS**

Locke & Key/The Sandman Universe #1 is published by IDW on 18 November.





Note: you only need to cover your mouth and nose.

SCI-FACT! Scott had Huey Lewis & The News' "The Power Of Love" and Stan Bush's "The Touch" on a loop while scripting the series.



Great Scott!

Cavan Scott promises there's more than meets the eye to IDW's **Transformers/Back To The Future** crossover

AS A CHILD OF THE '80S, CAVAN Scott was a fan of both *Transformers* and *Back To The Future*. But he never thought that he would bring the Autobots and Marty McFly together, as he now has in IDW's *Transformers/Back To The Future*.

"Both have been on my bucket-list to write and this way I get to tick both off in one go!" laughs Scott, who insists that the two properties actually have a lot in common. "First and foremost, both are action adventures and have plenty of lighter moments, with humour balancing the peril. Plus, if you were a reader of Simon Furman's Marvel UK *Transformers* stories, you'll know that *Transformers* has plenty of time travel built into its DNA."

Indeed, he takes his cue from Furman's classic run when it comes to how the Autobots come to fetch up in Hill Valley. "Marty suddenly finds himself and his family in a very different timeline, facing a very different way of life," explains Scott, who's joined on the

four-parter by artist Juan Samu. "Everything has changed and Doc Brown is nowhere to be seen. Something has gone very, very wrong with the space/time continuum..."

Along with Marty and Doc, Scott promises appearances from several familiar faces from both series. "Starscream has always been a personal favourite Transformer of mine, and apart from him, you should also expect Bumblebee, Prime, Soundwave and the Constructicons among others. As for Hill Valley residents, well, it wouldn't be a *Back To The Future* story without Biff," teases Scott, who believes that new Transformer, Gigawatt, has much in common with Doc Brown. "He's an Autobot with a chequered past, and he's not the only new Autobot on the block either, as there are definitely some new faces amongst the fan favourites." **SJ**

Transformers/Back To The Future #1 is out now.

NEW AUTHOR

JONATHAN SIMS

MEET THE PODCASTER/GAME DESIGNER BEHIND LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING HORROR *THIRTEEN STOREYS*



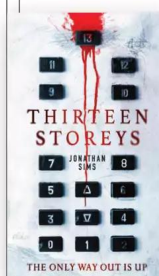
Tell us about your protagonists.

→ They're people from all walks of life, rich and poor, comfortable and precarious, who find themselves connected by an address. The only thing they have in common is that this strange, sinister building wants to show them something.

Did the idea have any particular spark?

→ Living in London, it's hard not to notice how more and more it's

becoming a shiny glass playground for the ultra-rich, with the rest of us squeezing into whatever space they grudgingly leave us. The idea of a towering luxury haunted house grew out of that feeling of alienation.



Did you have to do much research?

→ Absolutely! Research is one of my favourite parts of writing. What fascinated me most this time was probably researching the chapter with an art dealer protagonist. Discovering how weird and insular the art world is, with the idea of "the knock" and all the backroom dealing, was compelling.

Who is your literary hero?

→ RL Stine. A lot of people talk rubbish about the *Goosebumps* series because they don't stand up to adult scrutiny, but his work engages kids and gives them an approachable grounding in classic horror tropes. Mainly I'm inspired by his work ethic, though - over 90 books in a decade! **IB**

Thirteen Storeys is out on 26 November, published by Gollancz.

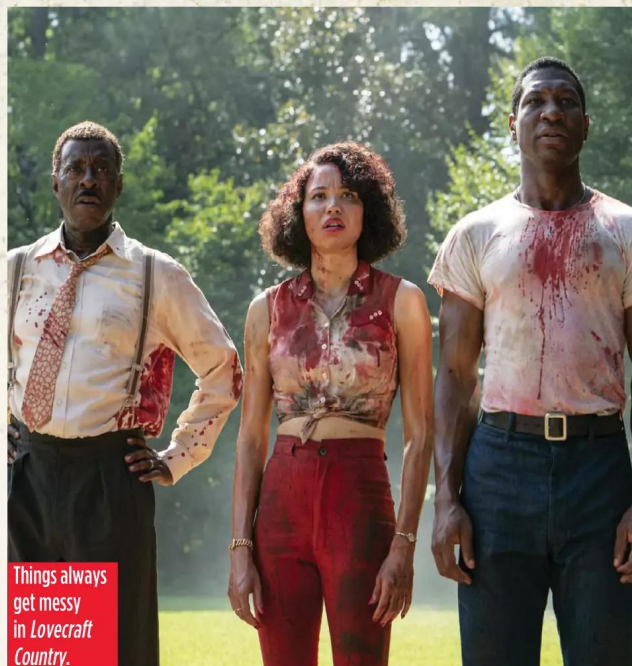


Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

GOIN' SOUTH

If you haven't caught up with **Lovecraft Country**, you must. Though there's an overarching story – of Atticus (Jonathan Majors) and Leti (Jurnee Smollett) travelling through Jim Crow America in the '50s, on the hunt for Atticus's missing father – the show is really an anthology, with each episode delving into a different subgenre, from *Indiana Jones*-style adventure to ghost story, Korean legend to Afrofuturist sci-fi. My favourite is the wonderful episode five, a full-on body horror focusing on Leti's sister Ruby (Wunmi Mosaku) who's given a potion which temporarily makes her white. It's a furious, fascinating, sensual and visceral discussion of racism from a female perspective. This is really exciting and important TV that positively revels in all the different wonderful ghosts and monsters it uses to explore the real terrible history of the South; sundown laws, Emmet Till's lynching and characters from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appear alongside Cthulhu Shoggoths in a way that feels anything but flippant. A must-watch.



Things always get messy in *Lovecraft Country*.

A wealth of brilliant TV, an ace debut from an Irish filmmaker and a sex blob in a box

which bears no resemblance to any real British boozier in the '80s) rather jar. It's quality TV, though, that suggests horror is in fine health.

IT'S GOOD, BUT...

Damien McCarthy, an Irish filmmaker I've been following for years, has finished his debut feature. It's called **Caveat**, and it's good! It's an odd three-hander about a shady guy who takes a job staying in a remote house for a week to keep a troubled young woman company. The catch? He has to remain locked in a jacket which restricts his movements about the house. This is creepy, twisty stuff which mixes crime with elements of the supernatural. McCarthy made one of my favourite shorts, "He Dies At The End", and has been honing his skills ever since. *Caveat* has a very distinctive look and feel, and reminded me a tiny bit of *Possum*. It does take a little while to get going, but that's the only, uh, caveat.

TALK ABOUT GRIMM

The digital version of **Grimmfest** ran from the 7-11 October. I didn't get the chance to attend, but some of the titles that got the biggest buzz included: Brea Grant's **12 Hour Shift** (also shown at Frightfest), in which an addict nurse (Angela Bettis) gets involved with organ-trafficking; noirish thriller **The Oak Room**, which sees a drifter telling tales in a bar during a snowstorm; and **Rent-A-Pal**, where a lonely bachelor finds a weird VHS tape featuring a charming man (Wil Wheaton) which appears to offer friendship and compassion – but at a cost. Rather less positively received was something called **The Special**, in which a bloke has sex with a blob in a box. Each to their own...?

BLY SPIRIT

The Haunting Of Bly Manor has landed on Netflix, the sequel to *The Haunting Of Hill House*. Once again, it's from director Mike Flanagan; an atmospheric show set in the '80s that jumps about between timelines exploring the backstories of its multiple characters. It's compelling enough, with the odd good ghost and jump scare, but it isn't as effective as *Hill House*. The source material (Henry James's novella *The Turn Of The Screw*) doesn't entirely lend itself to long-form adaptation, and some of the US cast's British accents (and a pub scene

Dreadful Old Movies

Classic horror! '40s radio show *Inner Sanctum Mystery* span off onto the silver screen, and Eureka Entertainment is releasing Blu-ray box set *Inner Sanctum Mysteries: The*



Complete Film Series on 7 December – six films with Lon Chaney Jr: *Calling Dr Death*; *Dead Man's Eyes*; *The Frozen Ghost*; *Pillow Of Death*; *Strange Confession* and *Weird Woman*.

► **SCI-FACT!** Harryhausen's ancestors were Germans who emigrated to the USA. The name's an anglicisation of Herrenhausen or "manor house".

Retro-active

100%
FAKE!

Curios from yesteryear that never quite made it here...



All irregularities will be handled by the forces controlling each dune. Transuranic, heavy elements may not be used where there is sea. Medium atomic weights are not advisable. Sapphire and Steel have been as-sand. (That's quite enough of that - Ed)

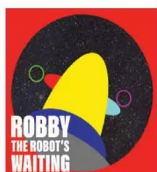
ART BY @ANDYDREWZ



Catch Some Ray

Explore the creations of famed animator **Ray Harryhausen** up close and personal

25 Is Alive!



What's the collective noun for a group of *SFX* editors? A geekery? A nerd-moot? While we're not entirely sure about the terminology, everyone who's been lucky enough to command the good ship *SFX* has come together to talk about the magazine's 25-year history - and you can listen in.

For the first time ever, sci-fi/fantasy podcast *Robby The Robot's Waiting* has

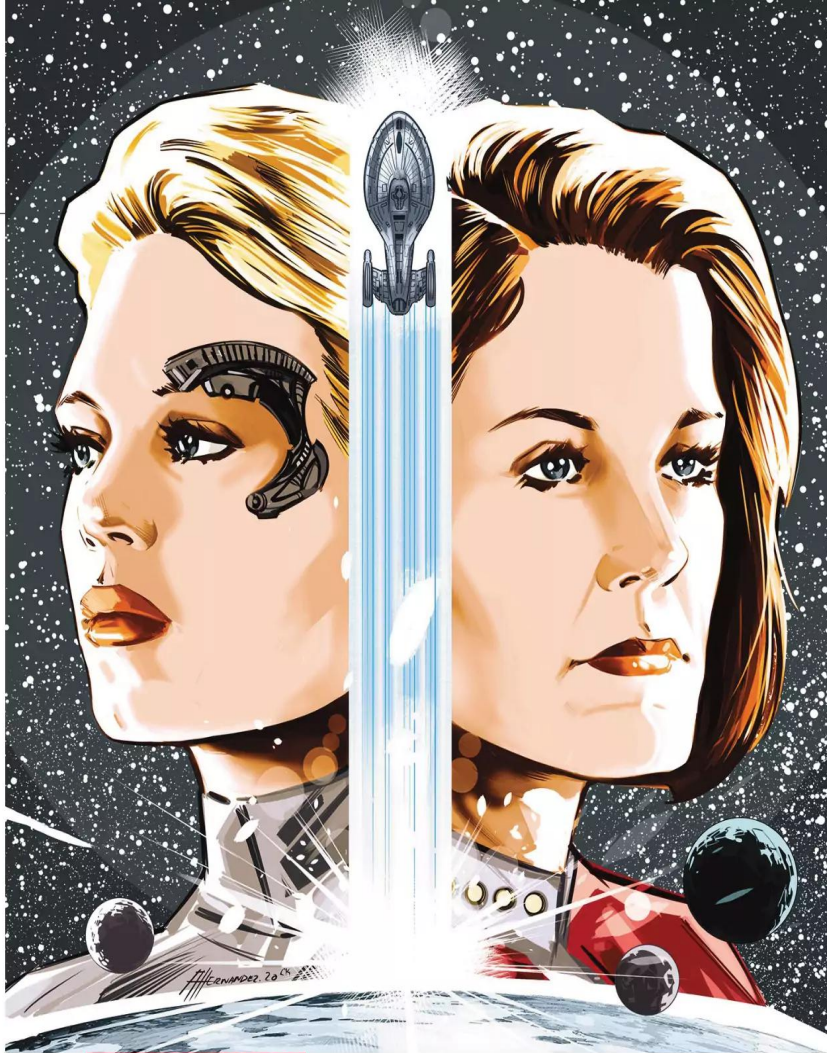
assembled all five editors in one place - okay, a Zoom call. In the two-part special, current *SFX* overlord Darren Scott is joined by launch editor Matt Bielby and his successors Dave Golder, Dave Bradley and Richard Edwards. (Bradley and Edwards are also the podcast's regular co-hosts.)

"We all love the mag, so it's been loads of fun to reminisce," says Edwards. "But it's not just anecdotes about the mag. *SFX* has had a front row seat for seismic changes in the media, whether it's the rise of the internet or superheroes taking over the world. Hopefully we've captured a bit of that."

Robby The Robot's Waiting Presents: 25 Years Of SFX is available now on Apple, Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts.

➔ **ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO KICK OFF IN** May, the exhibition Ray Harryhausen: Titan Of Cinema has finally opened its doors at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. It celebrates the centenary of the birth of the stop-motion innovator by displaying some of his original models, including the skeletons from *Jason And The Argonauts* and the Cyclops from *The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad*. These are accompanied by posters, memorabilia, storyboards, drawings and plenty of hand sanitiser. If you can't make it in person, an accompanying book (written by Harryhausen's daughter Vanessa) is available to buy now.

The exhibition is open until 5 September 2021. Visit nationalgalleries.org for more information.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Baker's Seven

Dave Baker spins a yarn in new **Star Trek: Voyager** series *Seven's Reckoning*

AFTER FEATURING IN *Star Trek: Picard*, Seven of Nine returns this month in a new comic series. Written by Dave Baker and Angel Hernandez, *Seven's Reckoning* takes place at a specific but so far undisclosed point in the *Star Trek: Voyager* timeline.

"I won't reveal where that is, but if you're a hardcore *Trek* person, it'll be pretty clear," teases Baker. "The book is made to be hopefully accessible to newer *Trek* fans, but simultaneously it's got lots of Easter eggs and *Trek* continuity woven into the fabric."

Leading on from last year's *Mirrors And Smoke* one-shot, *Seven's Reckoning* opens with the USS Voyager discovering a large, inter-generational ship that's stranded deep in the Delta Quadrant. "After boarding it, the crew discovers that the ship is in need of repairs," explains Baker. "They strike up a deal with the aliens in exchange for Seven's know-how. Seven is then sucked into a world unlike any she's

ever experienced. This alien culture is all based on story, so Seven will have to grapple with the fact that the stories we tell each other matter, but the stories we tell ourselves matter most of all."

While Baker praises Seven's journey to regain her humanity in *Voyager* as "a multi-faceted portrayal that's complex in a way that most characters from '90s network shows just aren't," *Seven's Reckoning* is actually inspired by *Next Generation* episode "The Outcast" and *Enterprise* episode "Cogenitor".

"Both deal with a crew member becoming entangled in an alien's culture and that experience shining a light on the shortcomings of the societies involved," he says. "I'm really excited about the way we were able to craft a standalone adventure for Seven that plays into her overall arc, and also delivers a narrative that hopefully has something very real to say." **SJ**

Star Trek Voyager: Seven's Reckoning #1 is out on 11 November.

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IN THE NEXT SFX



WHO'S THAT GIRL

She's back – and so are the Daleks

FREE GUY

Ryan Reynolds is breaking free

THE EXPANSE

On set for Amazon's sci-fi epic

CHILLING ADVENTURES OF SABRINA

The witch is back for one final showdown

THE STAND

Stephen King's epic returns to screens

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FORGET THE
SKYWALKER
SAGA – THE
MANDALORIAN'S
FIRST SEASON
WAS THE BEST
THING TO COME
OUT OF THAT
GALAXY FAR, FAR
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DISNEY BUYOUT.
AS SEASON TWO
ARRIVES, WE
PONDER WHAT'S
IN STORE FOR
MANDO AND –
YES – BABY YODA...

WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**

B A B Y Y O D A



GOT BACK



VER SINCE *THE Phantom Menace* landed in 1999, prophecies about a chosen one destined to bring balance to the Force have been the *Star Wars* galaxy's equivalent of watercooler chat. But little did we know that said chosen one would be a TV show about a lone gunslinger and his implausibly cute puppet sidekick.

When *The Mandalorian* made its Disney+ debut in November 2019, all was not well in that galaxy far, far away.

While the studio/corporate megalith had made a promising start to its custodianship of George Lucas's empire with *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One*, *The Last Jedi* and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* were somewhat divisive – a trend continued by *The Rise Of Skywalker*. *Star Wars*' first-ever live-action TV series was the best thing the franchise had delivered since the original trilogy. The fanbase was at peace for the first time in decades...

Getting back to the franchise's "space Western" roots, *The Mandalorian* owed as much to Clint Eastwood's *Man With No Name* as space opera. Set five years after the Emperor's (apparent) demise in *Return Of The Jedi*, it saw the eponymous bounty hunter (real name: Din Djarin) making his way through various wretched hives of scum and villainy

– and forming an unlikely bond with a Force-sensitive kid (known simply as "the Child"), who looks a lot like Yoda.

The show also plundered *Star Wars*' Expanded Universe, and animated shows *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, diving way further into the universe's lore than the movies ever managed. That might have something to do with the fact that Dave Filoni (a man who had George Lucas's ear when he was running *The Clone Wars*) was on board as writer, director and arbiter of what's *Star Wars* – and what isn't. Indeed, Filoni has described a key part of his role as "bringing balance to the Force".

"I'll come up with ideas and sometimes Dave will say, 'You can't do this in *Star Wars*,'" *The Mandalorian* showrunner Jon Favreau told *Entertainment Weekly*. "Then I'll cite examples from the movies, or *Clone Wars*, to try to use as a justification. I'm like a lawyer talking to a judge; I am to him as he was to George. I won't do anything without Dave's approval. To his credit, he understands that *Star Wars* needs to be fun and ever-evolving."

BABY, IT'S YOU

It's a strategy that paid off spectacularly, as "Baby Yoda" became an instant internet meme, and the show bagged 15 Emmy nominations. It went on to win seven of them, including one for Ludwig Göransson's fantastic Ennio Morricone-inspired score.

Displaying Jedi-like foresight, Disney was so confident it had a Death Star-sized hit on its hands that a second season was in production before the first had even aired. In fact, not even Covid-19 could stand in Mando's way, as production was completed – just – before the TV and film industry went into lockdown in March. "Under the wire? It was literally five →



In the future, Highland cows are all the rage.

ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Who's who in *The Mandalorian*



DIN DJARIN
aka *The Mandalorian*
(Pedro Pascal)

Raised by Mandalorians after losing his family in the Clone Wars, Din Djarin trained in the ways of the warrior race before joining the so-called "Tribe" on the planet of Nevarro. Like so many others in that galaxy far, far way, he became a gun for hire, finding plenty of work as a bounty hunter.



THE CHILD
aka Baby Yoda
(Himself)

Small, frog-like, Force-sensitive, looks good on a lunchbox... *The Mandalorian*'s breakout star isn't just a sidekick, he's the MacGuffin that drives the entire series. Where did he come from? Why do the Empire want him? And most importantly, how can anything be *that* cute?



MOFF GIDEON
(Giancarlo Esposito)

Could Moff Gideon be a villain who breaks even badder than Gus Fring? Early indications are that this Child-obsessed Imperial officer could be just as coldly calculating and ruthless as Walter White's nemesis. Having played a pivotal role in the "Great Purge", he brandishes the legendary Darksaber.



GREEF KARGA
(Carl Weathers)

The Mandalorian's former handler is a former magistrate who found work as an agent for the Bounty Hunters' Guild after the Empire fell. According to Weathers, "He's on a quest to be more legitimate, but I'm not sure there isn't something in the back of his mind that isn't more self-involved."



CARA DUNE
(Gina Carano)

A Rebel shock trooper during the war against the Empire, this Alderaan native is now a mercenary who becomes friends with Mando when they team up to defend a village from Klatoonian criminals. Weathers says Dune and Karga will be closer in season two, and indeed "almost finish each other's sentences".



Mando and the Child, just chillin' in their crib.



NEW! AHSOKA TANO (Rosario Dawson)

Anakin Skywalker's former Padawan left the Jedi Order after being falsely accused of murder in *The Clone Wars*. She subsequently survived the Emperor's Order 66 purge, and returned to help the nascent Rebel Alliance as the spy master "Fulcrum" in *Star Wars Rebels*. She went on to face her old master, Darth Vader, and was last seen with Sabine Wren, leaving on a mission to find Rebel Jedi Ezra Bridger.



NEW! SABINE WREN (RUMOURED) (Sasha Banks)

WWE wrestling star Sasha Banks pops up as a hooded figure in the *Mandalorian* trailer and unconfirmed internet buzz suggests she could be playing *Rebels'* resident Mandalorian, Sabine Wren. Whether or not the aforementioned mission to track down Bridger was successful, we're guessing she'll be keen to reunite her people.



NEW! BO-KATAN KRYZE (RUMOURED) (Katee Sackhoff)

It's yet to be officially confirmed but there's a good chance that *Battlestar Galactica* vet Katee Sackhoff is moving her *Clone Wars/Rebels* voice role into live action. Bo-Katan is a former member of the militant Death Watch who was leader of Mandalore by the end of *Rebels*. The question is, how did she lose control of the planet? And how did Gideon get her Darksaber?



NEW! BOBA FETT (RUMOURED) (Temuera Morrison)

A thousand years of pain and suffering in the Sarlacc's belly? Seemingly not for Boba Fett, who's probably found a way out. The *Hollywood Reporter*, er, reported that Temuera Morrison - who played Jango Fett on screen and reprised Boba - will appear in *The Mandalorian*. Unless he's suiting up as an ageing Clone Trooper, a Fett return seems inevitable.



NEW! COBB VANTH (RUMOURED) (Timothy Olyphant)

Now that Lucasfilm's novels and comics are part of *Star Wars* canon, anyone created for a book is fair game. Debuting in Chuck Wendig's *Aftermath* novels, Cobb Vanth is former slave-turned-sheriff who found some Mandalorian armour on Tatooine, "pitted and pocked, as if with some kind of acid". Could he have located the togs Fett was wearing in the Sarlacc?

days and the country went down,” said Lucasfilm boss Kathleen Kennedy in an interview with *The Wrap*. “We were enormously lucky, and then we didn’t wait [to start post-production]. Even though we wondered to what extent people could work remotely, our IT department and ILM had everybody up and running within a week, working from home and continuing to work in the cutting room and on visual effects shots. It was pretty staggering how quickly they got everybody up and running. So we haven’t really lost any time.”

When it comes to plot, however, Favreau and his team are playing their Sabacc cards so close to their chests that the cast were only allowed to read scripts for episodes they appeared in. To find out anything more, you’d have to be a

“As we introduce other characters, there are opportunities to follow different storylines”

Bothan spy. “Everything gets bigger, the stakes get higher, but also the personal story between the Child and the Mandalorian develops in a way I think people will enjoy,” Filoni told *EW*.

“As we introduce other characters, there are opportunities to follow different storylines,” Favreau added. “The world was really captivated by *Game Of Thrones* and how that evolved as the characters followed different storylines – that’s very appealing to me as an audience member.”

Favreau himself has written six of season two’s eight episodes (Filoni and Rick Famuyiwa, respectively, have scripted the other two), while the directors’ roster features Favreau, Filoni and returning season one helmer Bryce Dallas Howard, along with *Ant-Man*’s Peyton Reed, *Alita/Sin City*’s Robert Rodriguez, and Rocky-foe turned Mandalorian-ally Carl Weathers. The cast has swelled to the tune of *Aliens*’ Michael Biehn, *Daredevil*’s Rosario Dawson and *Deadwood*’s



“Last chance to look at me, Hector... uh, I mean Mando.”



“Take that damn thing off and you could aim.”

Timothy Olyphant. And season two won’t be the end of Mando’s story. Favreau’s said that season three is “on schedule” to start shooting before the end of the year, while Giancarlo Esposito (who plays Imperial Big Bad Moff Gideon) has let slip that it’s in “season three and season four where you’re really going to start to get answers”. But what can we expect in the meantime? *SFX* has dispatched a legion of probe droids to find out what’s going down...

CHEEKY MANDOS

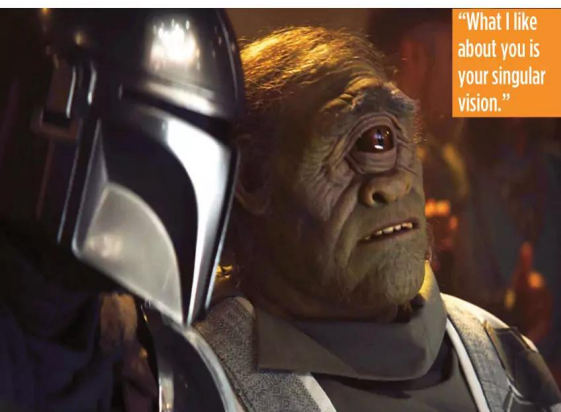
We’d say Boba Fett had us at “hello”, but the galaxy’s most infamous bounty hunter wouldn’t waste words on anything as trivial as a greeting. Ever since *The Empire Strikes Back*, Fett has been one of the most iconic characters in that galaxy far, far away, so his Sarlacc-related “death” always reeked of anti-climax. But did anyone think he was really gone?

As in the old “Legends” version of the Expanded Universe, it looks like Fett somehow

survived his digestive hell to play a part in the new season. His return was strongly hinted in the fifth episode of season one, thanks to a familiar clink of spurs when a mysterious figure approached the body of bounty hunter Fennec Shand.

Of course, Fett (a clone of his bounty hunter dad) isn’t technically a Mandalorian, but the race that inspired his famous armour is also set to play a part in the new season. Now armed with the Rising Phoenix (in layman’s terms, flying around with a jetpack), Din Djarin will surely be on the hunt for what remains of his people – especially since the Empire killed most of the “Tribe” who helped him protect Baby Yoda on Nevarro.

It seems likely that Djarin will run into Bo-Katan Kryze, the Mandalorian warrior who became leader of her people in *Star Wars Rebels* – and somehow lost the sacred Darksaber to Moff Gideon. Presumably we’ll also find out more about the Great Purge, ➔



“What I like about you is your singular vision.”



How does it feel to be connected to the *Star Wars* universe through *The Mandalorian*?

I've had the time of my life on *The Mandalorian*. It goes without saying that it is the ultimate privilege to be a part of this storytelling legacy. This is the first live-action *Star Wars* TV show and there's this sense of dedication to the origins of *Star Wars* that is mind-blowing. Bringing that honest vibe to the small screen is really important to me, and I love what's been done with the show.

What's it like to work with the Child?

For me, it's been fun to work with the Child because I've worked with the animatronic team before. I had worked with them on *Jurassic World* and on *Terminator Salvation*. Jon Favreau said to me, "Listen, you've got a lot of Baby in your episode and I want you to push the puppet. See what you can do. Come up with new stuff. Say things like, 'I wish Baby could do this and I wish Baby could do that.' Push it." In that episode, I had a lot of fun with that puppet. The puppeteers were incredible.

What's new with the Child in season two?

In the second season? What they have been able to do for Baby is just beyond. It's beyond, beyond, beyond! Baby's basically real at this point. It's crazy.

What was it like to walk onto a *Star Wars* set for the very first time?

Here's the wild thing... *The Mandalorian* wasn't my first *Star Wars* set. Growing up, I went to summer camp with Natalie Portman and we became friends. I went and visited Natalie on the set of *The Phantom Menace* quite a bit when we were 16 years old. I grew up around George Lucas, so going on a *Star Wars* set feels like my childhood in a lot of ways. When I was a kid, *Star Wars* was part of the fabric of my childhood – but now I get to continue that experience of playing with these characters and losing myself in these extraordinary stories.

What are your earliest memories of *Star Wars*?

When I was a kid, George



"I just feel like your directing is a bit too hands-on..."

BABY LOVE

Bryce Dallas Howard talks about directing season two, working with the Child, and her lifelong link to *Star Wars*

WORDS: ADAM TANSWELL

would send *Star Wars* figurines to my home every Christmas. Every year, I would play with them and I would immerse myself in that world. I was five years old when George, Kathleen [Kennedy] and my dad [Ron Howard] did *Willow* together, so George has been part of my life for a very long time.

So tell us... what's George Lucas really like?

George Lucas was and is an extraordinary mentor to my dad. Mentoring is very important to him. George is a huge mentor to [executive producer/director] Dave Filoni, and he actually told me a while ago that he considers Dave almost like a son. That's a very big deal because this has been George passing on his *Star*

Wars knowledge. The fact that Jon has created this opportunity for all of us, and mentored all of us... Well, it feels so honest and true to what George created.

How did you become involved with *The Mandalorian*?

We were at Pinewood near the end of the second *Jurassic* shoot, which is where they were also filming *Star Wars*. We were all on the same lot. I've always wanted to break into a *Star Wars* lot. I'm so desperate. I wanted to go and sit in the Millennium Falcon!

When my dad stepped into *Solo*, I was just finishing *Jurassic* and I called him up. No joke, I called my dad and I said, "Dad, I have never called upon you for any favours. There's not been any nepotism, nothing. I'm calling it in, dude. I have to assist you on that set. Please let me shadow you."

How did he respond?

He was like, "They won't let you do that. No-one's going to let you on this set." I pleaded with him, so he looked into it. I had some conversations with people and eventually they said yes, so I flew back to the UK and I stayed with my dad for the remainder of the shoot – and I shadowed him. During that process, I met some people at Lucasfilm and I was brought in as a writer on some smaller projects that different executives were working on. One of the executives put me up for *The Mandalorian*. Jon Favreau asked them if they had a suggestion for a director and the executive really went to bat for me – and I got the job. That's how it all happened.

Did you have to audition to be a director on a big show like this?

I went and met with Jon and we had a series of conversations about *The Mandalorian*. That's how I got the job, which felt like a total coup. I couldn't believe it. I *still* can't believe it. It's unreal. We would talk a lot about the character of Mando and his relationship with Baby. At its core, *The Mandalorian* is really a love story between a father and his son. We think about questions like, "What does it take to become a dad when you never expected you were going to become a dad? What happens when that relationship becomes the central part of your life?" All of that was part of Mando's journey.

What went through your mind when you read the new scripts for *The Mandalorian* season two?

I screamed a few times. I was so excited. To be honest, the most thrilling part for me was the technology we use to make the show. I've had a fascination with emerging technology for decades, so to work in the Volume [wrap-around LCD screens with CG backdrops] is an absolute thrill. Jon Favreau is really passionate about pushing technology forward and he's an extraordinary mentor. Visually, the show is totally spectacular and it's absolutely ironic because I remember growing up hearing George Lucas talk to my dad about technology. I have scarily good hearing and I can listen to multiple conversations at the same time. I can distinctly remember conversations that they had about cinema and about the convenience of technology – and here I am working in the middle of the Volume. It's unreal.



SECRET MISSION

Timothy Olyphant is appearing in season two of *The Mandalorian* – but as who? He's sworn to secrecy...

WORDS: ADAM TANSWELL



The face that launched a thousand lunchboxes.

What can you tease about season two of *The Mandalorian*?

The whole experience was great. It was a real kick, because Jon Favreau is a joy to be around. I love the way he works. There were days where I was sitting around certain creatures that I remember seeing on the big screen when I was a young kid, and that was really fun. On days like that, you sit back and think, "Wow. This is one of those unreal moments in life." I didn't see it coming for sure. You just sit back and enjoy it.

What are your earliest memories of *Star Wars*?

I remember going to the Briggsmore 7 Theatre in Modesto and watching the first movie. I grew up in Modesto, California. That's where George Lucas grew up. His parents lived not far from our place, so I felt a real connection to it when I was growing up. I love *Star Wars*. The first movies were amazing. Later on, I went to college and I read Joseph Campbell books. I was really into it, so I got a kick out of being on the set for this. It was fun to be a part of the show.

How did you become involved with the project?

At the risk of sounding pretentious, I got a call from Favreau. He and I have known each other for a while. He's always been one of the good guys out there. Any time I've had an opportunity to connect with him or interact with him, he's handled everything with nothing but class. When he reached out and he told me about this, I was excited to be involved. I said to him, "Yeah, I'll do that. Just send me a call sheet and I'll show up." There's really not a lot to think about when you're asked to be involved in *Star Wars*.

What went through your mind when you walked onto the set of *The Mandalorian* for the first time?

It's mind-blowing. It really is incredible. But then, to be honest,

it becomes the same old game after a while.

Were you on set with the Child?

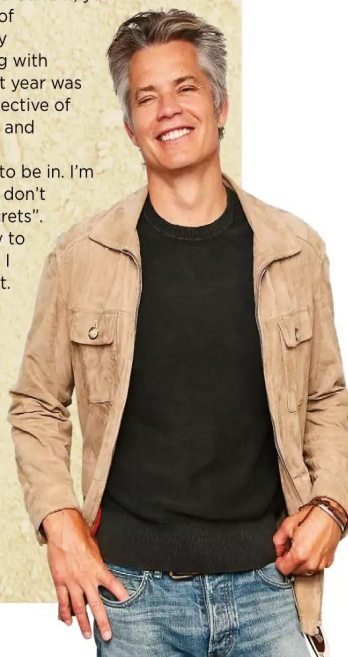
I got to meet the little guy in person. That was hard to beat. Working with Baby Yoda is the closest thing to working with Yoda. Yeah, that was really cool. I can't give too much away, but I got to work with... Wait, what are those little guys with the eyes that are always seen collecting stuff on the desert floor?

Jawas!

Yeah. That's it. I got to do a scene with the Jawas. I mean, that was a moment to remember, too. Hanging out with the Jawas was great. Apart from Mark Hamill, who else has worked with the Jawas? Not a lot of people. And they do wonderful work. That was one of those moments where you think, "Yeah, this is cool. This is something." And I didn't see it coming. I didn't think I'd be on a set like that, so it was great.

How easy is it to deal with the secrecy of a *Star Wars* project?

Any time you are part of something where people feel protective of the story and everything around it, you feel like you are part of something special. My experience of working with Quentin Tarantino last year was similar. He's very protective of his story. I appreciate and respect that. It's a wonderful position to be in. I'm a big believer in "You don't want to know the secrets". I love the opportunity to see something where I know nothing about it. With certain filmmakers and musicians, I don't want to know anything about new work because I know I'm going to experience it clean.



where the Empire wiped out most of the Mandalorians in a land grab for Beskar, the metal used to forge those iconic suits of armour. It's also worth mentioning that Jon Favreau has past form with Mandalorians: he voiced Pre Vizsla, leader of the Death Watch faction, in *The Clone Wars*.

"I know what [Baby Yoda] is," Pedro Pascal told *TechRadar*, but the closest George Lucas ever came to revealing Yoda's species or home planet was joking that he's "the illegitimate child of Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy". If *The Mandalorian* doesn't deliver a few more in-universe answers, however, we'll be talking *Lost* levels of disappointment.

Unsurprisingly, Dave Filoni understands how big a deal the reveal could be. "When [Favreau] brought up in the very beginning of doing this child and having it be of Yoda's species, I was like, 'Oh, that's very tricky,'" he told *Entertainment Weekly*. "Because there's never been this before outside of Yoda and then Yaddle [a female member of Yoda's species who appears in the prequel trilogy]. It's kind of a sacred thing. The fans want to know things are a calculated, careful decision. Then if you tell a good story, most of the time they go with it."

The Mandalorian season two trailer sets up Mando's quest to find Baby Yoda's people as

“When Favreau brought up the idea of doing this child in Yoda's species, I was like, ‘Oh, that's very tricky’”

the new season's main narrative thrust, but who he's looking for is left predictably ambiguous. Is it Yoda's diminutive green species, or the Jedi Order? The Mandalorian Armourer talks of "battles between Mandalore the Great and an order of sorcerers called Jedi", which hints at the latter.

It's well known that the Mandalorian and the Jedi Order have never been BFFs, but it's particularly intriguing that in this time period the Jedi have already passed into legend – mere decades after being *everywhere* in *The Clone Wars*.

Since the Emperor initiated Order 66, they're a rare breed, but Luke Skywalker is *not* the only one. There is another hope in the form of Anakin Skywalker's former apprentice Ahsoka Tano (reportedly played in live action by Rosario Dawson) – as one of Yoda's former co-workers, she could be an important wayfinder in the Mandalorian's mission.

Ahsoka wrapped up *Star Wars Rebels* by venturing into deep space to find fellow Force-wielder Ezra Bridger. Hopefully her



"You distract them – my flies are undone."



"What are you doing?" "I'm a background artist."

Stoke Newington, a busy Saturday night.

return in *The Mandalorian* will explain why she sat out the Rebels' battle with the Empire, and who knows? Maybe she'll bring Bridger along for the ride.

Imperial entanglements were kept to a minimum in *The Mandalorian*'s earliest episodes, with the small gang of Stormtroopers in the employ of "the Client" (Werner Herzog) one of the few reminders of Palpatine's overthrown military-industrial complex. But as Moff Gideon has become a major player, it's increasingly clear that the remnants of the Empire aren't going away quietly – even though they were soundly defeated at the Battle of Jakku four years earlier.

"I'll be going toe-to-toe with Mando," Giancarlo Esposito (Moff Gideon) told *Entertainment Weekly*. "It's an iconic battle. I want to disarm him mentally as well. Who knows? Maybe there's an opportunity to get him to fight some battles for me. You may think I'm a villain, but I'm trying to harness some energy and some powers for a path that could be best for all. You'll see him be somewhat diplomatic and more of a manipulator."

Why is Gideon so interested in Baby Yoda? That remains one of the show's biggest mysteries, though the fact that the Client's associate Dr Pershing wore Kaminoan insignia on his uniform suggests cloning could be on the Imperial agenda.

Perhaps the Empire sees the Child's Midi-chlorian-filled blood as a useful tool for rebuilding. They may even be working under orders from Palpatine himself, now that we know he survived his Death Star tumble.

And don't be surprised if we bump into some Imperials from Chuck Wendig's post-*Return*



"Dad, can I have an ice cream?"

Of The Jedi Aftermath novels – Grand Admiral Rae Sloane and General Brendol Hux (father of Kylo Ren's favourite frenemy) were both key figures in the formation of the First Order.

While Disney-era *Star Wars* movies have proved there are *lots* of desert planets in the galaxy, the one in *The Mandalorian* trailer really is that old classic, Tatooine. Given all the Mon Calamari (Admiral Ackbar's race) and Quarren (Squid Heads) wandering about on the ocean planet, we'd guess it's Mon Cala. And some have speculated (possibly tenuously) that the graffiti on a wall of one city suggests we're on Lothal, the key planet in *Star Wars Rebels*.

Most intriguing, however, is the theory that the icy world in the trailer is Ilum. It may not sound familiar but it will later become the site of the First Order's Starkiller Base. And at this point in *Star Wars* history, it's home to a Jedi temple – it may be a key clue in Mando's quest to find Baby Yoda's people. Seems like this story is only just getting started... ●

The Mandalorian is streaming on Disney+ now, with a new episode debuting every Friday.

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Cinque Terre, with a woman in the foreground holding a book. The town is built on a steep, rocky hillside overlooking the sea. The woman is wearing a teal jacket and holding a book with a circular emblem on the cover. The sea is dark blue with white waves crashing against the shore. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

HIS DARK MATERIALS

DESIGNING HIS DARK MATERIALS

PRODUCTION DESIGNER JOEL COLLINS TALKS US THROUGH THE CREATION OF CITTÀGAZZE, THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN THE WORLDS THAT TAKES LYRA TO NEW ADVENTURES IN SEASON TWO OF HIS DARK MATERIALS CURATION: **NICK SETCHFIELD**



Lyra and Pan take in the view of Cittàgازze.

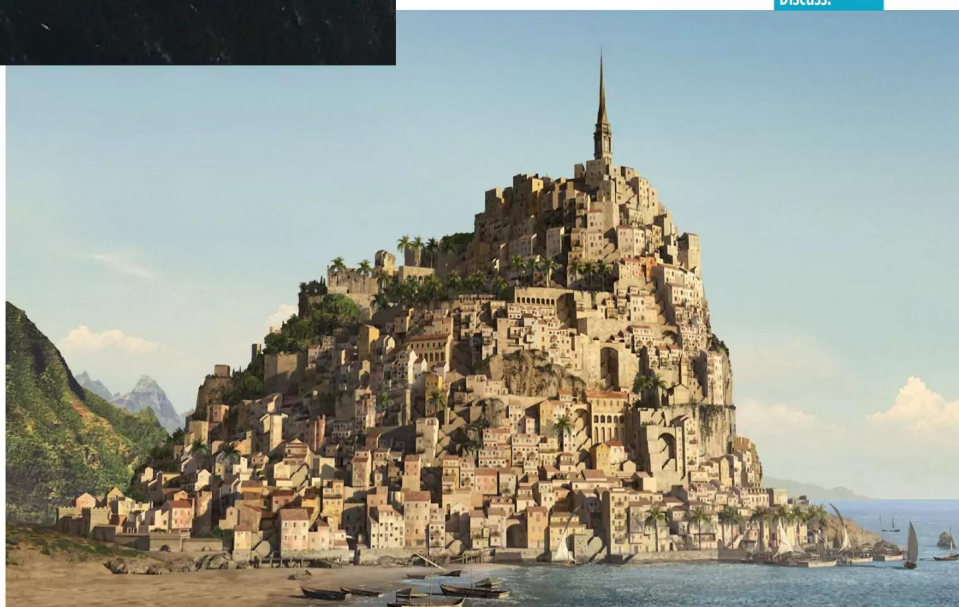
EVERYONE THINKS *HIS DARK MATERIALS* IS A LOCATION- AND VFX-based show. And that's just a presumption: oh, they've got money! But it's not. There are VFX in it, and there are a few locations, in equal measure, but we built this enormous amount of stuff to make a flavour and a tone. It's funny – you look at Cittàgازze, people aren't going to think we built that in Wales! But we did. People were sitting there having coffees. You get lost around it. It was a huge, huge space – and fun.

I was also well aware that we had young actors who are really talented. We wanted to give them something to physically engage with. I know that Dafne [Keen] and Amir [Wilson] ended up sneakily writing my name all over the town, because they said I'd made it. They were saying, "See if you can spot where we've written it!" So that was quite naughty...

Cittàgازze – a monument to greed? Discuss.

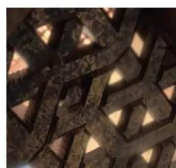
THE HISTORY OF CITTÀGAZZE

I started with a mound of rock and a small building, and I built the history of this entire town upwards, over centuries. When you have a place of homage and reverence people often spiral around it, a bit like an old castle where people would build their homesteads around the castle walls. It would be a magnet to people. So over the centuries people have built their way around the tower. We worked out the history of the place. It was where they forged the knife and they built the tower on top of the ironsmith. The mound grew and the town grew as the greed around the knife grew.

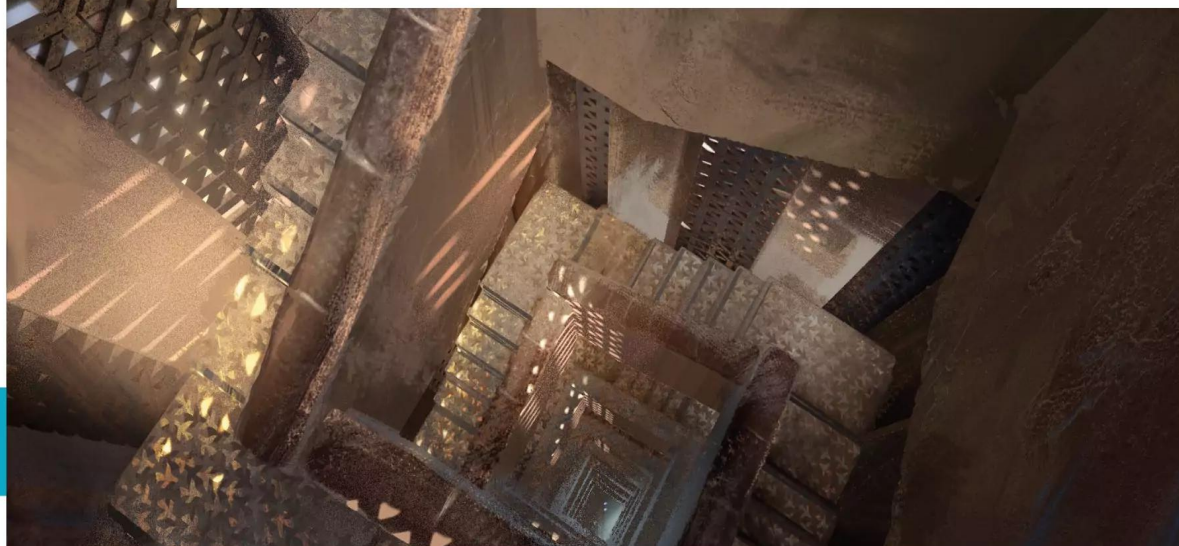


REAL WORLD INFLUENCES

Philip [Pullman] has given it this Mediterranean-Italian feel that he's clearly got from his travels. So there had to be something slightly Mediterranean in it, so there wasn't a disconnect from what Philip had written. In that sense, looking for that Mediterranean tone narrowed the search to anywhere from Europe to North Africa. I looked at a place called Cuenca in Spain. People use Cuenca to say, "You're a bit mad", because the buildings are so tall - they're built on the side of a mountain. I looked across Italy, Corsica, Croatia, and then towns across the world, like Morocco. I looked at something like 120 countries and tried to absorb my favourite bits of our world - I've used the well stairs from India across the entire town.



In the steps
of the famed
MC Escher
himself...



THE ESCHER INFLUENCE

One early inspiration was an artist I've always loved, MC Escher. He's like a mathematician and an artist. I liked Escher for the idea that you go through a door and come out another door that arrives back at the same place. Digging deeper into him I realised he seemed to have spent time in the Italian mountains, and a lot of his inspiration had come from these hill towns in Calabria and other places, which I was using as references. So I then pictured Escher, as an artist, as a Cittàgazzean who came through a window and never found his way back. I imagined Escher had come to our world and tried to tell everyone, "I'm not from here, and I'll keep drawing and explaining where I'm from, and hopefully you'll all get it, and maybe one of you can help me get home." And we all just thought he was an interesting artist... I loved the duality of his patterns: an angel that's a devil or a snake eating a mouse. Just these eternal images.



The art captures that Mediterranean vibe.

THE STREETS OF CITTÀGAZZE

The oddity of an empty town isn't the town's fault. The townsfolk have some issues which have made it empty. They've been a bit naughty and let the Spectres in, and the Spectres have caused quite a lot of horror and damage, and over time things have fallen to wrack and ruin. But that happens in Italian towns where there have been earthquakes and buildings are abandoned. Those places could theoretically be quite eerie but they are extraordinarily beautiful – people want to get married there, in those abandoned towns. It would be heavy-handed to try and make it, in its tone, eerie and awful, because it should, in itself, be quite beautiful.

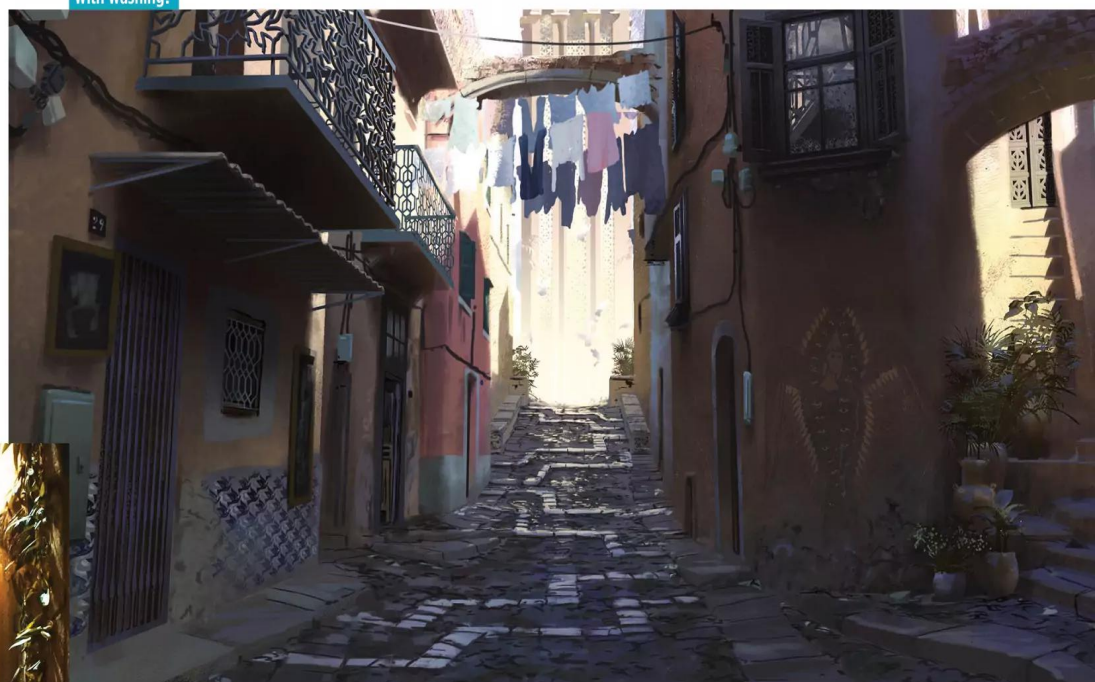
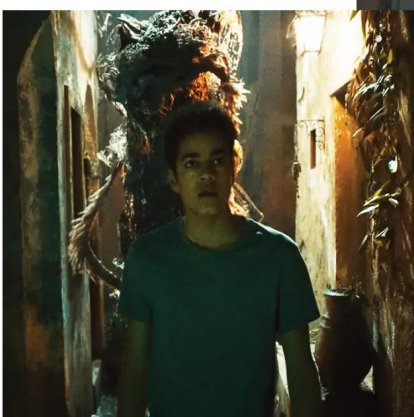
The deserted streets of Cittàgaze... with washing?

3D MODELLING

We did a proxy model town in VR. We walked around the VR version of the city in Unreal Engine. Once we settled on a shape and a space, flying in and seeing it, we then went and made our card models, moved those boxes around, narrowed the streets, zoned the buildings. Then we went back into VR and made it more accurate so directors could use it to plan their shoot. And then we wound it back out of VR into the set drawings, so that the 3D went to 2D, back to 3D, back to 2D. It was a complicated mix!



From virtual reality to card model, and back again.



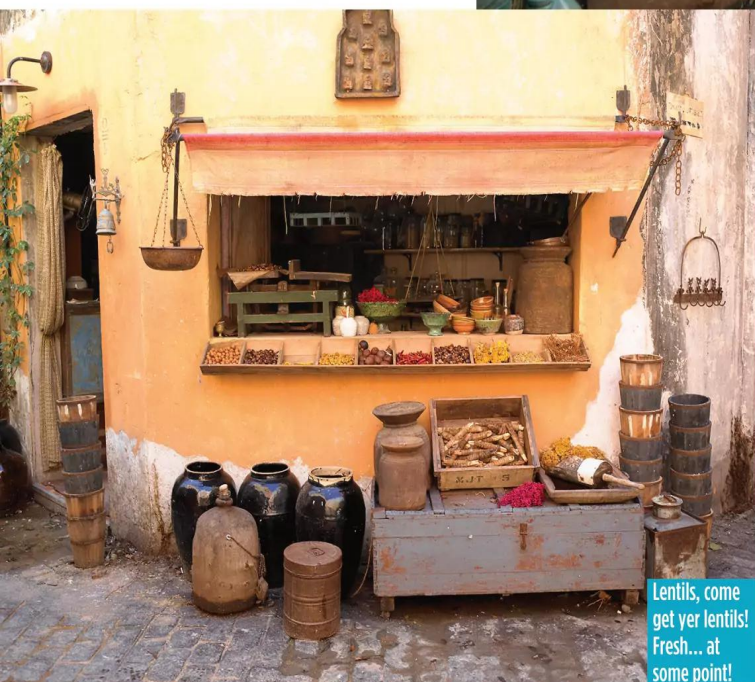


THE SHOP FRONTS

Humanity and texture are everywhere – but there are no people. The camera won't see all the detail – but it would see it if it *wasn't* there. The camera – and the eye – would see a lack of something. You sense a space, a gap, an emptiness. You're so drawn into the texture of the detail and the reality of this space that when you're on set and actually look above and you see one of the stage buildings, it's a bit of a shocker. It's quite funny. It's like when you've done a bathroom and someone's actually had a wee in it and it's just poured all over the floor of the studio because the plumbing wasn't real! That's happened a lot. I guess it's a compliment!



Creating plenty of on-set detail was crucial.



Lentils, come get yer lentils! Fresh... at some point!



Ever get that feeling you're missing something?



THE ANGEL STATUE

We wanted something a bit more dynamic than what look like doves' wings on a human. We tried many designs and a six-winged angel with this very proud design started to take form. We had someone working with us who's a great artist: Maddy Attwood is the daughter of Jane Tranter, who's the boss. I said, "Let Maddy have a go at some angels. She's got a great eye." And she nailed something extra. She had a slightly alternate view. We referenced every angel known to man, we looked at Milton's *Paradise Lost*, we looked at William Blake's illustrations. We went a bit deeper into the less prosaic and darker and more interesting places that people had gone to to express Heaven and Hell and the abyss.



Let us spire to greater things.
(You're fired
- Ed)



THE SPIRE

The knife has a specific design, which is a twist. I was trying to see how you twisted the tower top to be the same as the knife, but without it looking like an oversized knife. So what you can see here is the exploration of that, a few paintings of how that twist can look ugly or natural. Even through the VFX process we've tweaked and carried on tweaking, to make it feel more settled and real as an element. As we've moved through to the VFX creation of the town, Russell Dodgson of Framestore is turning it into a reality in digital form in the sense of the larger picture of it – the landscape beyond. Drifting into those final weeks to days to hours of getting it finished and making those tweaks is interesting. You laid those bricks a year and a half ago, and you're still moving, pushing, pulling, tweaking, looking at light, texturing. Real towns have centuries to settle; this town has had a few years. It wasn't done in a hurry, although it was no time at all. If every film year is maybe a hundred real years we've taken our time to try and do it the best we can. ☺



His Dark Materials season two will be showing on BBC One from 15 November.

HAPPY DEATH DAY DIRECTOR CHRIS
LANDON RETURNS WITH POST-SLASHER
COMEDY-HORROR **FREAKY**.
A FREAKY FRIDAY MEETS FRIDAY THE
13TH MEETS MEAN GIRLS FREAKSHOW
YOU CAN'T LOOK AWAY FROM

WORDS: JAMIE TABBERER

SWAP

CHOP

“GO FUCK YOURSELF!”

You'll have to trust us on this one: director extraordinaire Christopher Landon is speaking purely hypothetically... and with a riotous laugh.

His strong reaction is understandable: *SFX* has just asked what his message would be to horror genre cynics who jump to conclusions about his new film *Freaky* and dismiss it as “just another slasher movie”. Because, let's face it, there have been rather a few since John Carpenter basically invented the subgenre with 1978's *Halloween*.

“I'd say, that's the whole point of this movie: we're expecting you to have seen slasher movies,” he elaborates, before citing the film's crucial sci-fi twist: “We're expecting you to have seen body-swap movies [too]. But what you haven't seen – yet – is a body-swap movie that collides with a slasher. But I stand by my original answer: go fuck yourselves!”

Landon sums up *Freaky*'s plot as “about a young, shy high school girl [Millie] who swaps bodies with a serial killer,” combining the tropes of films as disparate as *Scream*, *Mean Girls* and the recent *Jumanji* films in one simple premise. Or, as co-writer Michael Kennedy more succinctly put it in his initial pitch to Landon, “*Freaky Friday* meets *Friday The 13th*”. My ears perked up!”

“This is the first time I've ever written a movie with another writer,” Landon says, admitting such collaboration was “something I've always feared, because I'm a bit of a control freak.”

His control freakery has served him well in the past: although best known as the director of the *Happy Death Day* movies, Landon has worked prolifically as a writer. One of his earliest hits was 2007's *Rear Window*-inspired *Disturbia*, a hidden gem in Shia LaBeouf's filmography; he went on to write four *Paranormal Activity* films.

But together, Landon and Kennedy found their groove, and *Killer Body* (as *Freaky* was

initially titled) quickly took shape. “Our sense of humour is very much aligned,” says Landon of his writing partner. “We'd assign each other chunks of 10 pages, write them separately, and email them and rewrite each other. Then we'd get together and rewrite it all again. It was a three-tiered process – but it worked really well for us.”

LANDON ON HIS FEET

The son of late actor Michael Landon (*Bonanza*, *Little House On The Prairie* and *Highway To Heaven*), Landon denies watching other horror movies for inspiration. “Although I can't speak for Michael – he watches horror movies day and night. And I would be too, but I don't get to watch anything any more, except *Elmo!*” (He and husband Cody Morris are parents to an infant son, Beau.)

“We talked about movies,” he adds of the preparation process. “But not *Freaky Friday* – the original or the remake. We didn't talk about body-swap movies at all! We talked about John Hughes films and *Jennifer's Body*, and they inspired us in different ways.”

Certainly, *Freaky* does not bear the influence of some of its trashier genre stablemates: believe it or not, it even has some arguably feminist moments, including an ending that elevates the “final girl” cliché into something more expansive. To be fair, Landon already helped to do that as a producer on 2015's *Final Girls*.

“It's something I explored in the *Happy Death Day* movies and wanted to explore again,” he says. “The notion of the final girl has evolved. Having characters with a true arc with some kind of emotional evolution, with agency [is key]. And it's important to have a female character conquering certain fears. Not being rescued by some guy; not just some flailing, screaming person who runs for 30 minutes and succeeds at the last second.”

Actress Kathryn Newton plays our plucky protagonist with gusto (“A workhorse, incredibly talented and really fun to be around,” says Landon), and if she's a new type of horror hero, so too is another standout

character that eschews tired stereotypes (obligatory Grindr reference notwithstanding): Millie's gay BFF Josh, played with sharp comic timing by non-binary star Misha Osherovich.

“What's interesting and unique about Joshua is, because the movie is written by two openly gay men, we were able to do certain things other people maybe couldn't do,” says Landon. “Joshua is this confident gay character; it's not a coming-out story. But we were also able to poke fun at our own culture!”

Did Landon base Joshua on himself? “No...” he says, before mulling the question over. “There are parts of him that are me, parts that are Michael and parts that are our friends. I feel like everyone has a Joshua in life! Outspoken, truth telling... that was another dynamic of the group, especially between Josh and [he and Millie's other friend] Nyla: best friends definitely call each other out and take the piss out of each other.”

Meanwhile veteran star Vince Vaughn (how is he 50?) plays the all-important mass murderer in whose middle-aged body Millie ends up, thanks to an ancient dagger. Although of course synonymous with crass comedies, he has actually played the most famous psycho killer of them all: Norman Bates, in the ill-fated 1999 remake of *Psycho*. In *Freaky*, he brings seedy intensity as the unwashed “Blissfield



“Feel like... hooking up?” This stuff writes itself.



“We could have a smashing time.” See?



Chris Landon on a potential *Happy Death Day 3*

"I've had the idea since I made *Happy Death Day 2U*. I've already pitched it to the studio and Blumhouse, and everybody loved it. The whole cast is down to do it. But, y'know, it's a numbers thing. [*Happy Death Day* grossed \$125.5 million worldwide; *Happy Death Day 2U* \$64.5 million]. It's weird, because the fact the second movie was not as successful as the first movie... It was still really profitable. It's like, 'Why aren't we doing this, guys? What's wrong with you?' And the two films together have built up a bit of a following. We're hoping it might happen one day. And it's fine, because - and this is a huge spoiler, but it's one I'm fine with - the third movie is not set on the same day. So we could make the movie now, or in 10 years."

Butcher" in one breath and comedy chops as a *Pitch Perfect* 2-loving teen girl the next. But it sounds like he's an even larger-than-life character (or maybe two) in reality...

"Vince is incredibly bright," says Landon. "He's one of the smartest people I've ever met. You can have these deep, sometimes challenging conversations with him. He's an opinionated guy, and our opinions aren't always necessarily aligned. But he has a lot of respect for people. Even when you disagree, it's a thoughtful conversation."

"He's also the comedic guy from the movies. When we were just hanging out on set between setups, he'd have the whole crew roaring. And he's a demanding actor, in a good way. He wants everything to be as good as it can be."

Vince's performance is a real rollercoaster: in one scene, as Millie, he even kisses a handsome high school jock. Landon recalls telling Vaughn and co-actor Uriah Shelton: "This is not a scene I intend to shoot for laughs - I want this to be a true love scene. That's the way we approached it, the way it was rehearsed. It's sweet! It's really a scene about

seeing a person for who they really are. We just screened the movie for the first time at a drive-in for a film festival and people were honking their horns and flashing their lights. What I

think they were celebrating was the intent of the scene. And I was grateful to not get pushback from the studio, or from anyone."

Speaking of larger-than-life characters, *SFX* has to ask about *Freaky* producer Jason Blum, of Blumhouse Productions; as part of their stable, the film joins a proud lineage, which includes everything from *The Invisible Man* to *Get Out*.

"He's Willy Wonka meets Robert Evans," laughs Landon, referring to the late, great producer of *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Godfather* and *Chinatown*. "He really is that guy: an old-school mogul. But he's also very filmmaker-friendly, supportive of the practice, stays out of your way and lets you make the movie you want to make. Which I appreciate, and it's why I've come back so many times to work with him." ●

Freaky is in cinemas from 13 November.



GIRL INTERRUPTED

Kathryn Newton plays body-swap victim Millie

Rising star Kathryn Newton is a genre aficionado, naming 2009's *Jennifer's Body* as one of her favourites. "Horror films have a different way about them, because the storytelling is [often] told without any words," she tells *SFX*. "It's the eyes, the way you move your body... It's more physical than just the lines on the page. It was fun to watch Vince run like me. He did a really good job of my Millie run, I have to say!"

After key supporting turns in serious dramas (she was Frances McDormand's daughter in the Oscar-winning *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, and Reece Witherspoon's in HBO's TV hit *Big Little Lies*), Newton is all about Millie's emotional journey in *Freaky*. "This movie is about a girl who doesn't believe in herself - it takes becoming someone else to realise how powerful she is," she says.

"By the end, she does come into her own power. It did make me feel really strong, and I was proud that this character grew. It's really a coming of age story; something that everyone goes through. I hope when [young people] see her standing up for herself, they realise they're going to figure it out too."

Eagle-eyed horror fans might recognise Newton as Alex in *Paranormal Activity 4* - another Blumhouse production. "I was so lucky to get to work with Chris and Jason [Blum] on *PA4*," she says. "I had the best time and learned so much. I was dying to work with Blumhouse again, as I love their movies."

"I was such a fan [of the *Paranormal* franchise] - I'd go with friends to the midnight showings and I'd close my eyes the entire time! I want that for people for this movie. We just had a drive-in [screening] and I brought friends. They were jumping, and I was laughing so much. I was like, 'It worked! It's really scaring people!' Or maybe they were just scared that I was sitting right next to them!"

"THESE AREN'T BIRDS EYE AND I WON'T EAT THEM!"



DALEKS!

CONQUER AND DESTROY!



WHILE THE DOCTOR'S AWAY, HER ARCH ENEMIES WILL PLAY... THE PRODUCERS BEHIND THE THRILLING NEW **DALEKS!** ANIMATED SERIES PREPARE THE BATTLEFIELD

WORDS: **WILL SALMON**

DALEKS!





ONCE UPON A TIME, THE DALEKS had empires. The children of Skaro conquered whole galaxies from their fleets of saucers, all led by the mighty, golden-domed Dalek Emperor. They battled Monstrons and Mechonoids, conquered the Archives of Phryne and finally set their eyestalks on invading Earth...

Of course, none of that happened on screen. While *Doctor Who* has filled out the backstory of its first and best monster (most notably in 1975's bleakly brilliant "Genesis Of The Daleks"), it hasn't spent too much time on what they get up to when the Time Lord isn't around. Instead, much of the lore surrounding them came from the printed page, in Terry Nation's *Dalek Special* and in the *TV Century 21* comic strips.

All of that changes with *Daleks!* – a new CGI animation launching online in November. With not a TARDIS in sight, it follows the pernicious pepperpots as they do what they do best: rampage across the galaxy conquering, exterminating and getting into scraps with enemies old and new.

COSMIC ADVENTURES

"It's all about the Daleks being the most Daleky Daleks that they could possibly be," says the series' writer James Goss down a crackly line in early October. *SFX* has just seen episode one, while the remaining four inch towards completion in an animation studio, somewhere in Salford.

"My *Doctor Who* as a kid was the 1960s *Dalek Book*, which I got from a jumble sale for 10p," says Goss, explaining the colourful tone of the new toon. "It was just full of the most insane and beautiful comics all about the Emperor and his henchmen having adventures across the universe."

Daleks! is very much in the same vein. It's a cosmic story told in (roughly) 10-minute chunks following the escapades of the Time Squad – an elite group formed by the Emperor to deal with an ongoing temporal threat. It's not long, however, before they bite off more than they can chew and come face to face with an old enemy. "It fits in wonderfully with things like the comics and the Peter Cushing films – that sense that the Daleks are just the most fun thing you can possibly look at."

Of course, the tinpot terrors are hardly famed for their wit and repartee. Aside from "Exterminate!" and the odd "My vision is impaired, I cannot see!" you're unlikely to get much chit-chat. The nature of the Time Squad, however, allowed for a degree of individuality that we've rarely seen since the likes of Dalek Sec in the David Tennant years.

"The two main characters in the series are the Emperor and the Strategist," says Goss.



Looks like Johnny 5 is about to be exterminated.

"The Emperor is, in many ways, a very simple Dalek. The Strategist believes that he's just this golden domed figure that's been promoted above his ability."

The Strategist, however, is very different. Inside his battered and beaten shell, "he's this super forecaster Dalek, lurking in the background manipulating everyone. It's a really interesting dynamic. And then you also have the Executioner, who Big Finish writer Lizzie Hopley describes as 'mental bulldozer' – and it's exactly that. It's a Dalek that just exists to kill, kill, kill."

Voicing each member of the Time Squad is Nicholas Briggs, the actor and writer who has been behind the Daleks' ring modulator for 20 years now. "You just have to hear Nick performing these Daleks to go, 'Oh it actually works,'" says Goss. "You can have Daleks with different shavings of character without breaking them."

ANIMATION OF THE DALEKS

Of course, the idea of a Dalek series is not a new one, with their real-world creator trying to get a spin-off series made several times. "Yes, Terry Nation wanted to make one," says producer Chris Allen. "It's nice to be able to fulfill that, to do Daleks without the Doctor."

Daleks! was not always intended to be a full series. "Luke Spillane [*Doctor Who*'s Digital Marketing Manager] said, 'It would be really nice if we had a few bits of Dalek animation, so we can see what they've been getting up to,'" says Goss. The plan quickly evolved into something much bigger. "Luke and Chris went away and, in the middle of a pandemic, came back and said, 'We've got this much money, let's go and make an hour!'"

From there, Allen turned to an old colleague, Jon Doyle, who had worked on some of *Doctor*

Who's previous forays into animation, including the Richard E Grant-starring *Scream Of The Shalka*. He co-directs *Daleks!* with Peter Craddock of Studio Liddell, the team hired to actually make the show.

"They came to me saying that they had a bit of a challenge and would I be interested," says Doyle. "I read the script and realised that it needed to be different to the 2D digital system that is used on other *Doctor Who* projects. I know Studio Liddell really well and they're problem-solvers – and that's what we needed."

The Salford-based team, headed up by Peter

Craddock, came up with something very different indeed. While animations like the recent reconstructions of lost stories *The Faceless Ones* and

Fury From The Deep aim to faithfully recapture the look and feel of live action *Doctor Who*, *Daleks!* needed to be bigger and visually bolder.

"The script is full of multiple locations, multiple Daleks, lots of spaceships – it's really dynamic," says Doyle. "It felt like we needed something where we would have more control over the cameras and have less of that rostrum camera feel to it."

Complicating matters was the fact that the series was made entirely during lockdown, and

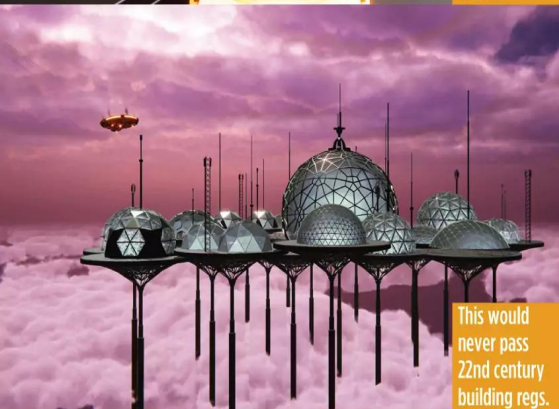
“There’s the sense that the Daleks are just the most fun thing you can possibly look at”



The Dalek Centipede just wasn't happening.



"Stalks up if you're gold. No? Just me then..."



This would never pass 22nd century building regs.

on a tight deadline. Craddock hit on a solution. "We're using a game engine to generate and develop everything you see on screen. We can put a camera anywhere and do practically anything," he says. "It allowed us to experiment and very quickly see what worked and what didn't. We're a small team, but this allowed us to really crack on with it."

As we mentioned earlier, the series pitches the Daleks against an old foe. Nope, it's not the Doctor, the Time Lords or even the Cybermen. Instead, the team looked back to an early – and perhaps under-appreciated – William Hartnell adventure: "The Chase". The best *Doctor Who* story ever," Allen laughs. "It's one I watch frequently with friends and a bottle of wine. It's best seen that way."

Ah yes, "The Chase"... This 1965 six-parter sees a squad of Daleks pursuing the Doctor throughout time and space, taking in the desert planet Aridius, the Empire State Building and a beautiful alien city that's home to a race of flamethrower-wielding robots... Yep, in a 2020 smackdown that nobody saw coming, the Mechonoids are back!

If you're going "Whooooo?" right now, don't worry. The Mechonoids (or Mechanoids – there's some debate on just how it's spelled) were, in Allen's words, a "wonderfully obtuse" attempt by Terry Nation to replicate his success with the Daleks. These bulky bots from the planet Mechanus never quite caught on with the general public and were mostly forgotten. *Daleks!* aims to change all that by upgrading them, giving them new skills, more personality and a Queen (*Bodyguard* star Anji Mohindra) who is having none of the Daleks' BS. It's "a wonderfully shady turn," grins Allen.

"The Daleks versus a race of bitchy hexagons? It's just tremendous fun," laughs Goss. Weren't the Mechonoids a bit, well, rubbish, though? Goss disagrees. "For far too long people have viewed the Mechonoids as a joke. They're wonderful and they made a great foil for the Daleks in the comics. The idea in

THE DALEK CHRONICLES

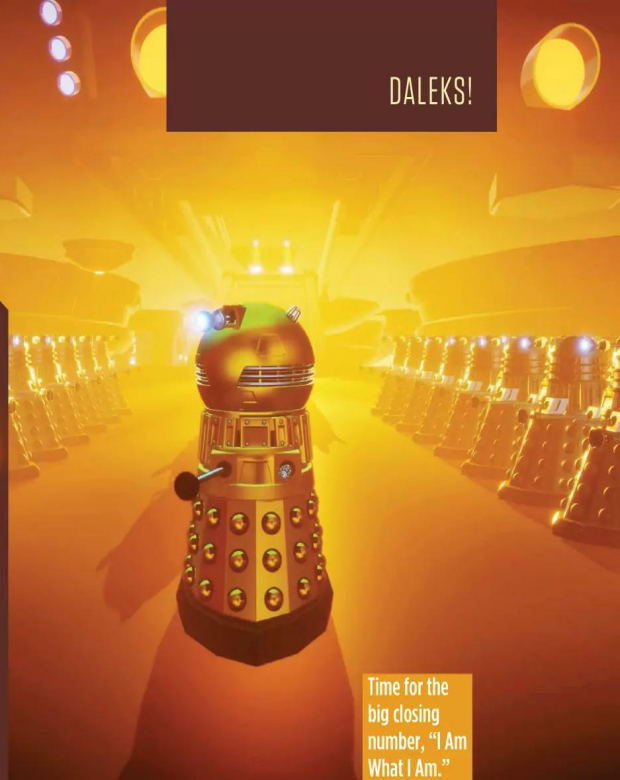
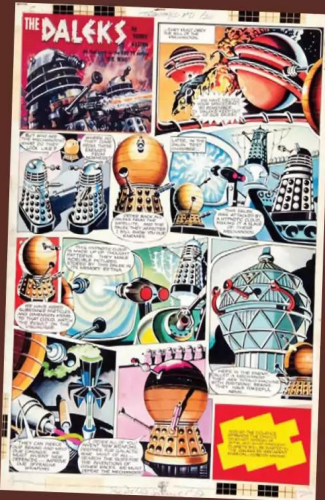
The other genesis of the Daleks

"Part of the brief was to remember the comics of the '60s, where the Daleks had their own adventures," says Jon Doyle of the one-page strips that inspired much of the new animated show. "If you look at those, even the way they're laid out is dynamic. They just look exciting and we thought, 'If we can capture some of that...'"

The Dalek Chronicles remain one of the most fascinating nooks of *Doctor Who* deep lore. Published in *TV Century 21*, a children's anthology comic that launched in 1965, they enabled Dalek creator Terry Nation and former *Doctor Who* script editor David Whitaker to explore the Daleks' origins over 104 thrill-packed installments – illustrated by Richard Jennings, Eric Eden and Ron Turner.

The strip revealed the Daleks' secret transformation from blue-skinned humanoids with big, bulbous heads into the scheming war machines that we know and love. Young readers learned of the assassination of peaceful Dalek leader Drenz by War Minister Zolfian, of the scientist Yavelling who built the Dalek casing and the rise of the golden Emperor. This is a Dalek history with no Doctor or Davros but boundless imagination, and it remains beloved to this day.

The complete series was reprinted by Marvel in 1994 and is now highly sought after. But if you're not quite ready to drop the best part of £100 for a tattered copy on eBay, fear not: Panini are currently sourcing scans of original artwork from collectors for a future bookazine collection.



Time for the big closing number, "I Am What I Am."

the series is that they've upgraded their software and now have this enormous sense of joy about them. They're having a wonderful time trying to rule the universe and they really revel in it. The Daleks consider them to be their inferiors, but actually they have the measure of the Daleks throughout."

A DOCTOR WHO BUFFET

Daleks! isn't coming out in isolation. Its release is tied into the wider *Time Lord Victorious* event currently running across books, comics, audio plays, toys and even T-shirts. From the outside an event like this can look daunting and impenetrable, but Goss is keen to stress that you don't need to be up to date with the arc – or following it at all – to enjoy the new show.

"Somebody on Twitter asked, 'Is it like an all-you-can-eat buffet?' and, yes, it pretty much is that. You have this enormous array of glorious *Doctor Who* dishes and you can just pick and choose exactly which ones you fancy. And if you're not at all interested in *Time Lord Victorious* but you've decided that you simply have to watch the *Daleks!* animation, you'll get a full story told over five episodes."

Will watching it along with experiencing the other parts of the arc add anything? "Yes. If you've been following some of the other strands then you'll go, 'Ooh, I know why the Emperor is going to the Archive of Islos' and things like that, but you shouldn't, at any point, feel excluded from this story. *Time Lord Victorious* is all about just picking and choosing the bits that really appeal to you."

Might there be more *Daleks!* to come, after *Time Lord Victorious* has wrapped up? "This is a one-off," says Allen. "I would obviously like us to do more. The more people who watch it, the more that's more likely. But this tells a self-contained story. That said, there is a little cliffhanger..." he teases. ●

Daleks! starts streaming on the *Doctor Who* YouTube channel on 12 November.

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THE WALKING DEAD

DECADE OF THE FEAR

ZOMBIE SAGA **THE WALKING DEAD** HAS JUST CELEBRATED ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY ON-SCREEN. WE TALK TO CAST AND CREW ABOUT PASSING THIS LANDMARK

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**



O

N HALLOWEEN NIGHT 2010, the television adaptation of Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* hit small screens in the US, later going on to air in 120 countries. Based on the long-running post-apocalyptic comic, the Frank Darabont written/directed pilot "Days Gone Bye" sparked an unexpected global phenomenon. Of course, horror-tinged TV series were nothing new, as shows like *Supernatural* had previously been hits, but nothing in horror TV had produced something quite like *The Walking Dead's* zeitgeist takeover.

At the height of its popularity in season five, more than 17 million people in the US alone tuned into certain episodes, with average seasonal ratings upwards of 20+ million viewers via various viewing platforms around the globe. A decade later, *The Walking Dead* is now a universe, with multiple spin-off series, and theatrical films planned that would bring chief protagonist Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) back into the narrative after his departure in season nine.

Perhaps more telling is how many creatives are still working on the show

“The crew really invest in it, and they want every single detail to be perfect”

10 years into its run. Hollywood is a town known for its nomadic players, who often move on quickly from project to project for a myriad of reasons. But the likes of current executive producers Scott M Gimple, Denise Huth, Angela Kang and Greg Nicotero have credits going back to season one and two, as do staff in many other roles.

For Denise Huth, who came to the show as a producer with Darabont having worked with him on *The Mist*, that lack of attrition is one of the achievements that the current executive producers are most proud of. An on-set producer in Georgia from the pilot to this day, Huth tells *SFX*, "This show is harder than most shows. We're outside almost all the time. We're in the woods, and the terrain is very difficult. Our crew has to work in these incredibly difficult environments,

and the fact that they come back year after year is a real testament to how much they enjoy the work on this show. These people really invest in it, and they want every single detail to be perfect."

From the pilot forward, Huth says that standard of excellence has always been in the DNA of the series, with Andrew Lincoln setting the bar high from day one.

"From the very beginning, Andy embraced it," she attests. "He was doing something kind of crazy at the time – going to America to star as a small-town sheriff in his zombie show. He took a huge leap of faith and came in with the attitude that this was going to be great. He, and Jon Bernthal [Shane] and Sarah Wayne Callies [Lori], from that very first season, made a very active decision that they were going to be friends. They were going to bond. They were going to feel like there was a history of a relationship among these characters, from the second we started rolling."

BRING OUT THE GIMPLE

That commitment radiated off the screen for fans of the comic like Scott M Gimple (now Chief Creative Officer), who remembers seeing the poster for the series on a bus and getting "so psyched" to watch it. "I watched it with my wife, six Sundays in a row, live," he reminisces.

By season two, Gimple found himself up for a potential writing job on the show, which he almost declined. "I was like, 'I don't know about that. I love it so much. I don't know if I want to see behind the curtain.' But I wound up meeting people →





It was a big weekend for Bez and the Mondays.

PERFECT TEN

Cast and crew pick their favourite episodes

NORMAN REEDUS I think the series of events that happened with Andy [Lincoln]'s departure [in season nine]. There was a time when Rick was so blinded by rage that he was making all these crazy decisions. But I think when we get trapped in the hole, and Daryl's saying, "You're not listening to me, you're putting yourself before everybody else," we're forced to have that conversation. From that moment on to the moment on the bridge, those series of events were the most collaborative experiences on the show.

ANGELA KANG My son playing Maggie and Glenn's dream child during Steven [Yeun]'s last episode [7.01]. He was born during the [lifespan of the] show, so many of my warmest memories really are tied up with the show.



Ah, the sheer horror!
NO SOCIAL DISTANCING!



SCOTT GIMPLE I think it was making "Clear" [3.12]. I was on set for that whole thing, working really hard with the director Tricia Brock, and with Michael Satrazemis, who was a cameraman on the show at that time. I remember coming away from that episode and being like, "Oh, I just did exactly what I want to do." That's an incredible feeling.

DENISE HUTH "Lines We Cross" [10.01] last year was just a massive, massive undertaking. Doing that opening sequence and taking the entire crew to Jekyll Island to film over the weekend in the middle of the summer, that was something! Up until when we got there, I wasn't sure if it was a good idea. But we got through it amazingly.

IAN GOLDBERG "The Grove" [4.14] which we were lucky to have [director] Michael Satrazemis on, who's our producing director now on *Fear The Walking Dead*.

ANDREW CHAMBLISS "The Grove" is a big part of the reason he is with us, as our producing director.



"It's just a flesh wound, nothing to worry about."

"You've got red on you."
"I KNOW."

The evil mastermind behind it all.





"Hey everyone, let's do the show right here!"

from AMC, Darabont and Kirkman, and I'm like, 'Darn it. I want to do this!' It was amazing just to be there after being a fan, and suddenly talking to Glenn [Steven Yeun] and talking to Rick Grimes on set. As soon as I got there, I was like, 'This is what I should be doing. I love it.'

Just two seasons later, Gimple ascended to showrunner of the series, mentoring writers like Angela Kang and Matt Negrete, who now showrun *The Walking Dead* and *The Walking Dead: Worlds Beyond* respectively. As the creative throughline voice for the franchise today, Gimple admits that he learned a myriad of lessons as a writer/producer in his early seasons, which he's woven into everything that's come since. Being in the trenches with the cast, living

in the Alexandria back lot for season five, learning from directors like Greg Nicotero, and getting ideas from contributors like focus puller David Galbraith – who found the pecan grove location that became the setting for "The Grove" – all helped to make the series bold, ambitious and creative.

"I discovered you need, occasionally or intermittently, to go far away from the comic to truly honour the comic, to keep the surprises or the discovery," Gimple says. "Even for the comics fans, like myself, I wanted to have that. But also take opportunities that the book presents, and run with them. Characters that seem cool, but either didn't last long, or just weren't the focus of things, or little things that Robert dropped in the book; details

“Occasionally you need to go far away from the comic to truly honour it”

along the way that turned into things that could birth whole stories.”

Controversial moments like Glenn's faux death in season five came from big creative swings Gimple says they believed in taking. "I remember walking away from set with Steven, and he had always said, 'This is the taste maker season,' which I tried not to think about. He was like, 'See? That's what it was.' I remember that Steven being so happy with the season meant so much to me. I was too, and everybody else, but it was just the way he was saying it."

TOMORROW PEOPLE

While the horror presented with gory relish in every Walker sequence became infamous for how far it pushed boundaries, the writers always knew they had to maintain a story about characters for the series to sustain in the long run. "Zombies are a part of it, but really, at the

"PART OF ME IS IN DENIAL!"

Norman Reedus on a decade of Daryl Dixon

How does it feel knowing that *The Walking Dead* will likely finish airing in 2022, with season 11?

● I feel kind of bittersweet about it. Part of me is ready for a spin-off and ready for the excitement of what that will be. And then another part of me is sort of in denial! I've been doing this for a while now. It's become such a big part of my life, so it doesn't really seem real. And then again, we're shooting 30 straight episodes, so we might just want to kill each other by the end of it!

Did you ever expect to be on the series for this long, or for Daryl to become so integral to the story?

● Not at all. I thought that I would be on the show for an episode or two, and I was excited to do that. It kind of opened a door with my character to do other things that weren't in the comic book, because he wasn't in the comic books. I got to roam around and do different storylines, sometimes to support those [comic] storylines, and sometimes to do my own thing. It gave me the freedom to do things. I didn't expect to be around this long. I used to be the young guy on the show. Now you guys all watch the grey on my chin happen in real time!

When Rick Grimes exited the series, did it feel it was time for Daryl to fill that leadership role?

● I remember when [Andrew Lincoln] left, I was calling [executive producers] Angela [Kang] and Scott [Gimple] and I was like, "Do not give me those long Rick Grimes speeches! I'm not the kind of character that's like, 'Build me a box to stand on so I can give a speech'." That's not Daryl. He's kind of a reluctant



All fun and games till someone dies.



leader, who gets things done. He doesn't want to be the guy that everyone looks at and goes, "What do we do now?" He's just not that guy. And you can't make him that guy.

Carol and Daryl have a spin-off series set for 2023. What do you hope that will look like?

● I'm curious what the similarities will be and what the differences will be. I know there'll be a lot of differences. And I know the themes of the two shows are completely different. It's about the two of us going to see who's left in the world. When I was a kid I was a big fan of TV shows like *Kung Fu*, where you have a character who's roaming the Earth. It's an opportunity for us to get really good actors and really good writers who don't have to sign a seven-year contract, so they come in for an episode or two. I'm curious to have a revolving group of people.

Why do you think the show has been so enduring?

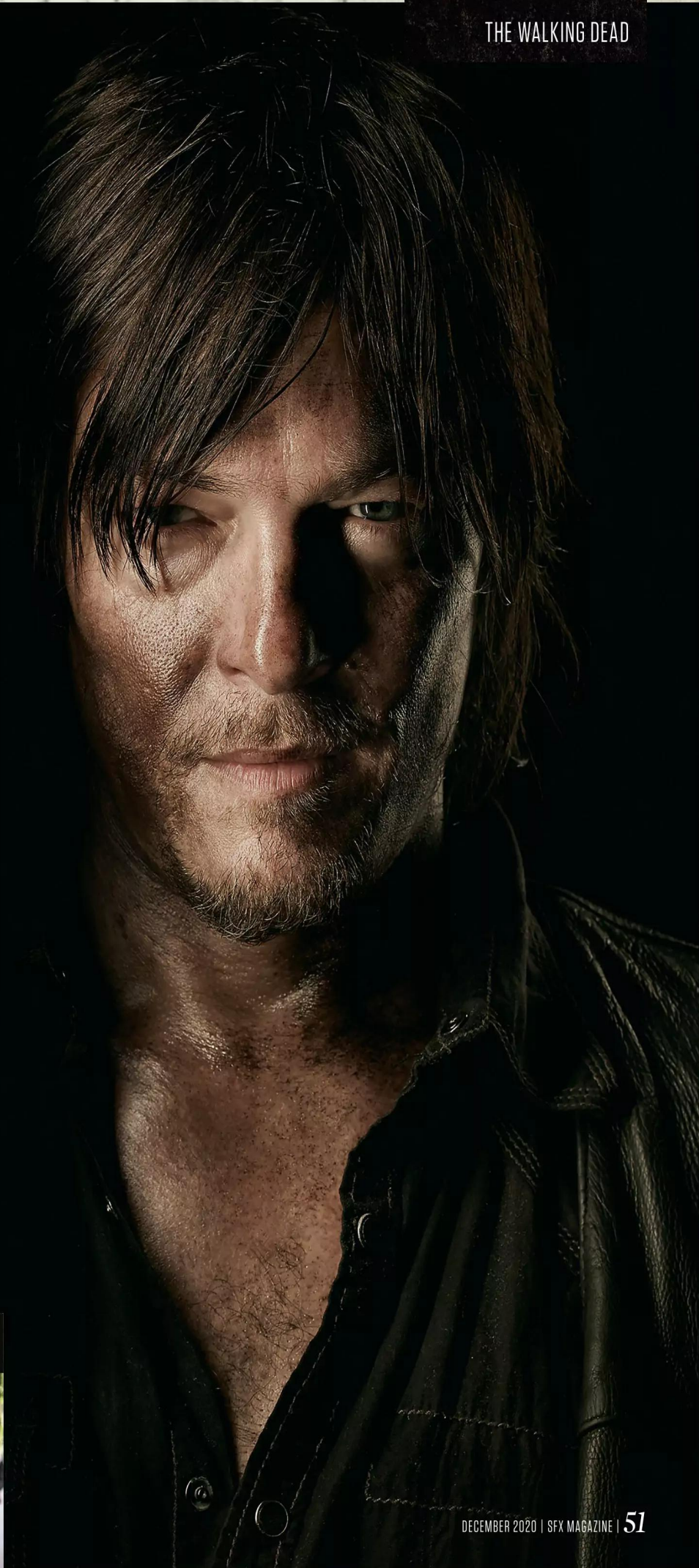
● I think beyond the apocalypse, the show is about these characters. You see these characters from different walks of life who are completely opposite. They never would have been together, they never would have spent time together if this didn't happen. And the only way to survive this apocalypse is if they all work together. It's wild to be in a Covid-19 pandemic during all of this, because I feel if everybody would have stuck together, like the characters on *The Walking Dead*, we probably would be over this by now. I hope those are the lessons that people walk away with.



"...and it was Keira Knightley!"



Someone's feeling a bit left out.



core, it has always been about these survivors," Angela Kang reiterates. From her first script "Secrets" (2.06) to her most recent, "Lines We Cross" (10.01), Kang says it's the humans who are endlessly interesting. "There are so many stories you can tell about the people. And there's different kinds of people that you run across in life, different kinds of leaders, different kinds of governmental structures. So as they wander through this apocalypse and try to figure out how to build something that lasts, it gives us so many story possibilities."

It's a world that has always had diversity in terms of characters and casting – something many other shows are only just now trying to achieve. "We were very fortunate with the template that Robert laid out in the book," Huth says. "It's something that Frank started, and every showrunner now up through Angela has really embraced: that this is a world that would be a very diverse world, just as our world is. The show should reflect the audience. And all of our

“I hope that *The Walking Dead* is viewed as classic genre TV”

characters are so unique and so interesting. The fact that we have so many people of colour and women in lead roles that are not only lead roles but also villainous roles – like Samantha Morton as Alpha – is iconic.”

Across 10 seasons of storytelling to date, Gimple, Huth and Kang cite the character arc of Carol Peletier, played by Melissa McBride, as one of the – if not the – best of the series. "Seeing Melissa's journey has been just amazing," Gimple enthuses. "It was something that I knew she could do. And to be able to map that out was a very, very big deal."

Huth concurs, adding, "Carol is a very different character in the comic books. And it's not a secret that there was a time when Carol was potentially going to be killed off in the show. It was something I fought very hard against, as did many other people."

"Melissa has such depth of character and humanity, and you don't see female characters like that very often, who've done such horrific things. Every child she's ever met, she's lost. What she has had to persevere through, and who that

character has become now... When you go back to that first season and see where she is now, it's an epic story."

THE END IS NIGH

Now that it's official that *The Walking Dead* has only 30 more instalments, it's all about landing the conclusion of this epic journey. Kang says, "What we're excited about is that we have actually a good amount of creative runway to wrap up the series in a way that hopefully is respectful and satisfying. I feel a lot of responsibility, and want to do right by all the incredible people who work on the show – and the people that have been with us on this journey as well."

When the main series finally fades to black, Gimple says, "I hope that *The Walking Dead* is viewed as classic genre TV, and that we're alongside things like *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*, and that people look up at the shelf of *Walking Dead* DVDs, and they're glad that they're there."

And that fans stick around for their continuing suite of Walker stories, too. "Hopefully, all these different perspectives on the world add up to a much richer place," he says of the spin-offs. "The difference between *Iron Man* and *Guardians Of The Galaxy* is pretty substantial, and that's the sort of difference that I'm hoping we can achieve at the end of the day." ●

Past seasons of *The Walking Dead* are available to stream on Now TV and Amazon Prime Video, or to buy on DVD and Blu-ray.

Take That
embark on
their last
ever tour.



"Yeah, I can
see what the
problem is
now."



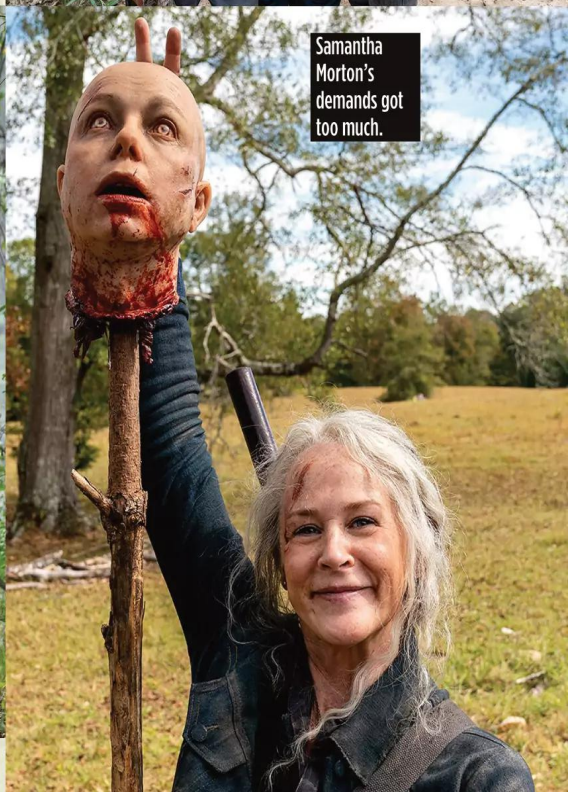
Someone else
is also feeling
left out of the
action.

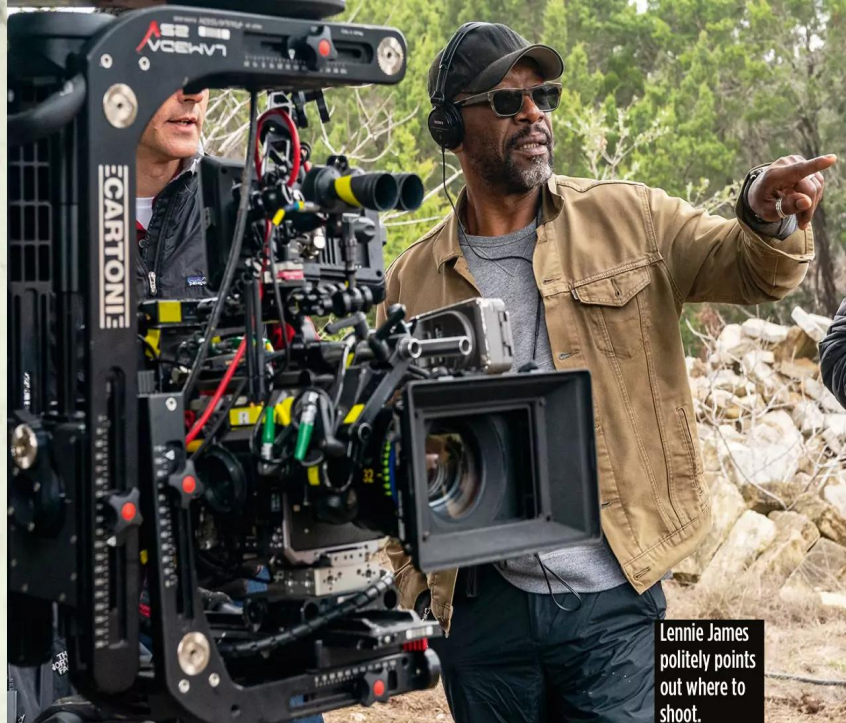


"...and over
here, I'm
growing the
mint."



Samantha
Morton's
demands got
too much.





Lennie James politely points out where to shoot.



"YOU are."
"No, YOU are." "No, YOU are." Etc.

VIRGINIA'S PLAIN

Fear The Walking Dead's showrunners on the latest season

The first spin-off TV series of *The Walking Dead*, *Fear The Walking Dead* (2015), is still ambulating along like a Walker that's latched onto the fresh scent of blood. Six seasons into its narrative, *Fear*, like its parent series, now looks very different from the way it started. Character-wise, only three members of the original cast – Alycia Debnam-Carey (Alicia), Colman Domingo (Strand) and Rubén Blades (Daniel) – are still fighting for their lives. The landscape has changed from Los Angeles to the dusty wilds of Texas. And two *Walking Dead* characters, Morgan (Lennie James) and Dwight (Austin Amelio), have migrated into core storylines.

Reinvention is something showrunners Andrew Chambliss and Ian Goldberg have embraced since they took over the creative reins of the series in season four, and they promise that the currently airing season six will change even more.

"It all came out of what these characters had been through, which in season five was a very different tone and flavour than I think we'd seen on either of the series thus far," Goldberg tells *SFX*. "It was something much more hopeful, a little lighter in tone, that was about characters coming together under this philosophy of benevolence and helping people in the world. And they did a lot of good, but ultimately it all came crashing down for them."

Season five ended with Morgan's band of altruistic survivors getting hammered by Virginia (Colby Minifie) and her Pioneers. All of the characters were split apart and taken to the four corners of Virginia's communities, with no idea how one another are faring.

Structurally, that separation enables the showrunners to tell the kind of single story-focused episodes

they loved experimenting with in seasons four and five. "We knew we wanted to tell more closed-ended anthology stories, where we'd be following two or three characters inside these different communities of Virginia's," Goldberg explains. "I know [executive producer] Scott [Gimple] described this season as 16 little movies that ultimately build to a greater story. It also felt emotionally like a way to explore these characters under the microscope of who are they becoming, and how they are changing while they're separated from each other, and in this whole new world where they're not calling the shots any more."

Goldberg's deep into writing the back half of season six episodes, where the standalones really shine, and says there's one in particular that focuses on Grace (Karen David). "That ended up as a story we've been very passionate to tell for a while. It's incredibly unconventional structurally and just a deeply emotional and very weird episode that we really look forward to sharing with everybody."

Chambliss also warns that Morgan, with three seasons under his belt as one of *Fear's* central characters, is headed for a serious reckoning this year. "His journey in season four was all about coming to a place where he no longer feared getting close to

people, as someone who has lost so many people who were so important to him. Season five was about Morgan really starting to look towards the future and towards the kind of world he would want to live in. And obviously, that didn't go well with his showdown with Ginny at the end of the season."

"Season six, for Morgan, is really about taking stock of who he's been, and all the different places his character has gone," he continues. "We thought of 6.01, 'The End Is The Beginning', almost as the death of Morgan Jones, because he was going to have to rise up as someone new." He notes that Morgan has typically been a very binary character, swinging from violent in *The Walking Dead's* "Clear" to the pacifist he became in season four and carried through to *Fear*.

"By the end of 'The End Is The Beginning' he's realising it doesn't have to be all or nothing," Chambliss says. "He can pick and choose these parts of himself that are needed and he can start to rebuild himself. He has this line in 'Alaska' [6.03] where he says, 'I've been 16 different somebodies'. And a big part of his journey this season is going to be about him gaining the confidence in who he is at his core. Not just being confident in that, but in *liking* that person. That's going to be the steps

he takes this season in figuring out both who he is and what that means for all the things that he wants."

And what exactly *does* Morgan want? Chambliss teases, "We know he's taking some tentative steps towards rebuilding family again, in the way that he opened up about the feelings he felt for Grace. We know Grace is carrying a child, so there are going to be a lot of questions he's going to begin asking himself about, 'What does my future look like?'"

Of course, all of the characters have to get through Virginia first, and that's not going to be easy. Goldberg praises actress Colby Minifie for "electrifying" the part of the Pioneers' leader in a way the writers could have only dreamed of. And the showrunners promise that the audience will come to know exactly what makes her tick this season.

"We saw in season five that Virginia is a ruthless character and she seems pretty singularly obsessed with building her empire, no matter what she has to do," Goldberg says. "There's something that really gets her goat about Morgan Jones. But yeah, she did drive away at the end of season five with Morgan still alive. And that is a question that we're going to explore going into season six: why didn't she finish him off when she had the chance?"

Goldberg closes with a big tease: "The other thing that we're really excited about, in terms of peeling back the layers on Virginia, is the introduction of her sister Dakota [Zoe Coletti, introduced in 6.02]. In the same way that Morgan or Strand or John Dorie, or any of our heroes are driven by the people they care about, the same goes for Virginia."

***Fear The Walking Dead* season six is currently airing on AMC (via BT TV) on Monday nights.**



Monday morning rush hour in the year of Covid.

TRAKER



FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR

WITH A GROUNDBREAKING CG SPACESHIP AND GENERAL RELATIVITY AS THE BAD GUY, **FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR** IS A KIDS' SCI-FI MOVIE LIKE NO OTHER. DIRECTOR RANDAL KLEISER AND STAR JOEY CRAMER TAKE SFX BACK IN TIME

WORDS: RICHARD EDWARDS



IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO WIN AT Hollywood, Disney is doing it right now. With all the *Star Wars* and the *Marvels* and the *Pixars*, however, it's easy to forget that the company hasn't always been top mouse. In the mid-'80s, even the studio's animated movies were struggling to make a mark – though Disney did have a decent line in the kind of mid-budget family films that would, these days, find their natural home on Netflix. *Flight Of The Navigator*, the story of a 12-year-old kid from 1978 who suddenly finds himself transported to 1986, is arguably one of the most fondly remembered of those.

By the time *Grease* director Randal Kleiser came on board – *Rocky*'s John G Avildsen was attached at one point – the movie was already well into development. Unfortunately, Disney and their production partners at Producers Sales Organization (PSO) couldn't quite agree on the movie's direction.

"There were a lot of meetings around that time about the tone of the movie," Kleiser tells SFX on a Zoom call from his Los Angeles

office. "Disney wanted to make a family film and PSO wanted to make an action picture. They wanted to have the army come in and shoot down the spaceship, and Disney said, 'No, we want dancing little animals!' It was hard to negotiate but I think we have a mixture of all that. The first half of the movie the action people were happy, and then the second half the Disney people were happy."

The movie's plot, based on Mark H Baker's story, is built around a surprisingly complex premise. As in Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, the antagonist is Einstein's theory of general relativity, as young David Scott Freeman (Joey Cramer) is abducted by an alien spacecraft. While no time has passed for him, the fact he's travelled at the speed of light means that he returns to Earth eight years after he left.

"I think kids can understand it," says Kleiser. "*Back To The Future* was sort of like that, and kids are smarter than most people think. You just tell them that you're going at the speed of light and time slows down, and they get it."

David is instantly plunged into a horror movie scenario where strangers are living in →

ALAMY (3), GETTY

his house, and questions about the identity of the American president are top of the agenda. By the time David is finally reunited with his family, he has to face the fact that his little brother Jeff is now his 16-year-old big brother.

They're such big themes to deal with that finding the right kid to carry the film was essential – especially as David features in almost every scene. The production ultimately settled on Joey Cramer, a Vancouver native who'd appeared alongside Tom Selleck in *Runaway* and Daryl Hannah in *The Clan Of The Cave Bear*, as well as guesting in an episode of *Murder, She Wrote*.

"We saw hundreds of kids," recalls Kleiser. "One of them was Chris O'Donnell, actually, and we also saw Joaquin Phoenix [who starred in *Space Camp* the same year]. But Joey was so easy to get to cry. For him to be able to do it in the audition – and be also so personable and likeable – was the thing that won me."

"*Navigator* was really my first part where I had to cry, so I hadn't really had any experience up until then, but I seemed to do it well," says Cramer, now 47. "I maybe had a big imagination, and I could really just put myself in these situations. Randal made me feel really comfortable and really safe. It was somewhere I felt I could go to those emotional places."

"I would never watch the dailies," he adds, "because Randal never wanted me to be self-conscious about seeing myself. I appreciated that."

Aside from a few spaceship interiors shot in Norway – PSO had some production credits they had to spend there – *Flight Of The Navigator* was filmed in Florida, with Fort Lauderdale serving as David's home.

"Our original idea was to film in Houston, but the weather was not good because it was the winter," Kleiser recalls. "We thought Florida would be better, and we were actually going to shoot at Cape Canaveral, but the Challenger disaster happened the day we were supposed to shoot. After we heard about Challenger we ended up doing all the NASA shots at a sewage plant that we slapped NASA logos on."

ON REFLECTION

In 2020 no kids' sci-fi movie would risk waiting until its second half to roll out all its big-money effects shots. But *Flight Of The Navigator*'s opening act is remarkably low-key, with just some clever UFO-style trick shots of a frisbee, a water tower and a blimp reminding you you're in fantastical territory. "Everyone knew it was a space movie," admits Kleiser, "so I tried to tease the audience to keep that idea alive."

You do see the spaceship eventually, however, and finding the right design was arguably as



Punishment for on-set bad behaviour was severe.



The spaceship gets towed for a traffic violation.



"Mom, can we get one of those?" "NO."



Three steps to heaven (um, plus another two more).

important to the success of the movie as casting Cramer. The resulting shiny, egg-like craft is such a triumph of early computer animation that it deserves to be mentioned alongside subsequent CG groundbreakers *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

"I was a big, big fan of science fiction, and special effects," says Kleiser, who lists one George Lucas among his USC classmates.

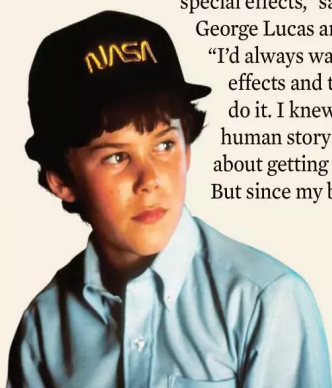
"I'd always wanted to work in special effects and this was my first chance to do it. I knew that [*Navigator*]'s human story was great, so it was just about getting to the visual effects part. But since my brother, Jeff, was a visual

effects supervisor, I had a lot of experience of knowing what was going on in the field."

In 1986, a spaceship with a mirrored surface was incredibly difficult to render, pushing mid-'80s reflection-mapping technology to its limits. "I wanted to find something different that hadn't been done before," Kleiser explains. "I was driving down the freeway behind a big

"I'd always wanted to work in special effects and this was my first chance to do it"

ALAMY (5)





It looks like a lab, but it's actually a larder.



Close encounters of the shiny kind.

silver truck, and I could see my car reflected behind it. And I thought, 'Wow, I've never seen a spaceship like *that*.' So I got this idea of doing a mirrored spaceship. We did lots of experiments with mylar and couldn't figure out how to not see the camera. I talked to George Lucas about it, and he said, 'Don't do a mirrored spaceship. It's going to be more trouble than it's worth!' It took a while till we figured out how to do it."

If the exterior of the ship came straight out of hard sci-fi, its interior was rather more Disney-orientated. Sure, the gleaming walls brought an

CRAMER ON CRAMER

New documentary *Life After The Navigator* looks back on the movie and the life of its star

After *Flight Of The Navigator*, Joey Cramer was a hot property in Hollywood – he was even offered the role of Wesley Crusher in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Instead of pursuing stardom, however, he opted to return to a normal life in Canada. Sadly, the subsequent three decades have been anything but plain sailing, as various issues with addiction and the law came to a head with his 2016 conviction for armed robbery – and a two-year custodial sentence.

It's a story that Lisa Downs, director of 2017's *Life After Flash*, thought was worthy of the documentary treatment. "I was going through films that I loved as a kid and really the first one that came to mind was *Flight Of The Navigator*, because I just adored it," Downs tells *SFX*. "I read what had happened to Joey Cramer, and I just thought that would make the most interesting documentary. You can read the consequences of someone's life but you don't know how they got from A to B just by looking on Wikipedia."

As well as speaking to Randal Kleiser (who's executive producer on *Life After The Navigator*) and numerous other members of the cast and crew to look back on the making of the movie, Downs conducted several interviews with Cramer himself. "When Lisa and I started talking, I thought, 'Wow, this could be a really great opportunity for me to share my experience and maybe help someone else who's going through something,'" Cramer explains. "Something I learned was that it's the things we *don't* say that can keep us in shame or guilt. Once I shared everything, I had nothing to hide any more, and it's made it so much easier for me to live free of the negative parts of my life."

***Life After The Navigator* is released on Blu-ray on 9 November, then heads to Amazon Prime on 1 February. lifeafterthenavigator.com.**



Some of the film's stars today, Cramer included.

impressively futuristic sheen, but it was populated by a menagerie of weird creatures – including the super cute Puckmaren, voiced by Tim Blaney (also the voice of Number Five in *Short Circuit*). It also had a quirky robot pilot known as Max at the helm.

"It was absolute magic," says Cramer nearly 35 years later. "It looked like a real spaceship. The creatures were all there, even though they were puppets. Max would come down from the ceiling or up off the floor to interact with me – Tony Urbano was the head puppeteer and he would do the lines with me on set. We developed quite a relationship."

Max's on-screen vocal performance, meanwhile, belonged to the most famous member of the cast. Paul Reubens was already a big name – in the US, at least – because of his Pee-wee Herman character when he agreed to voice David's surprisingly benevolent abductor. (The film also featured an early appearance by Sarah Jessica Parker.)

"We were trying to find a different kind of voice and one day I asked Paul," says Kleiser. "When he agreed it was kind of a surprise, though it was weird that he didn't want to have his real name used – I've never figured out why. [Reubens is credited as Paul Mall.] I've worked with him since then on *Big Top Pee-wee*, but he seems to have distanced himself from *Navigator*."

NEVER GO BACK

Flight Of The Navigator wasn't a major hit on its cinematic release but it found an audience on VHS and TV, as a generation of kids were captivated by David Scott Freeman's bizarre predicament. "The fact that it's become kind of a cult classic is nice," says Kleiser. "I run into people all the time who say that it's their favourite movie, and that they really like the fact that it explored how time travel could change a sibling relationship."

"When it first came out I think maybe it just wasn't marketed properly, but then you can never tell what's going to happen when you open a movie."

Over the last decade there have been numerous rumblings of a remake or reboot, with *District 9* director Neill Blomkamp one of the bigger names attached to a new version.

"I'm happy they haven't so far because sometimes those don't work out so well,"

laughs Kleiser. "There's very few remakes or reboots that are better than the originals. You know, if something works, it shouldn't be remade. It's the movies that don't work that are the ones you should remake." ●

The limited edition *Flight of the Navigator* box set is available from Second Sight Films – visit secondsightfilms.co.uk.

MALCOLM MCDOWELL

The *Truth Seekers* star talks breakfast cereal, death threats and drag

Words by Ian Berriman

Those blue eyes! The surrounding features may have changed with the passing years, the hair above them turned into a silvery shock, but there's no mistaking their mischievous glint. And whenever their owner's smile bends into a smirk, you get a sudden flash of Alex DeLarge or Mick Travis.

We meet the man who killed Kirk in inauspicious surroundings: not just a dingy catering van, but one parked near a derelict, bird shit-encrusted Shredded Wheat factory. We're on location for *Truth Seekers*, a new series from Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, centred on Frost's amateur ghost hunter. As Gus's curmudgeonly dad Richard, introduced on a stairlift and prone to sitting about in his pants, McDowell is often the butt of the joke – but as our conversation makes clear, the actor clearly thinks ridicule is nothing to be scared of...

So how are you finding working in the disused Shredded Wheat factory?

➔ It's sort of sad in a way. I mean, I guess this was state of the art when it was built. But it's an amazing place to shoot. I have to be honest, I never was that keen on Shredded Wheat myself – I found it rather dry...

You've worked with some incredible talents –

➔ ...And now I'm down to this? I'll tell them you said that!

Noooo! What Simon and Nick do isn't comparable to Stanley Kubrick or Lindsay Anderson, but it's their own unique thing.

➔ That's exactly it. They are unique and very interesting – and I'm a fan of theirs. I wanted to work with them, and I'm very happy to, because it's nice to get to know them. It's a unique kind of thing, to have a scary thing that's funny. This is not ha-ha funny, though. It's gentle humour that's very much character-bound. They're very quirky characters, and it's very offbeat.

You and Simon have something in common: *Star Trek*. Did you bond over that?

➔ We did have a little giggle about it. The first words I said to him were, "So, you know Bill Shatner?" – which is always a good opening line. And he went, "Oh god. Yes, of course, we have that connection."

BIODATA

From
Born in
Horsforth,
Leeds; raised in
Bradlington and
Liverpool.

Greatest Hits
If..., *A Clockwork*
Orange and *O*
Lucky Man! made
McDowell's
name. He also
played HG Wells
in *Time After*
Time, shot Kirk
in the back in
Star Trek:
***Generations*, and**
was Dr Loomis in
Rob Zombie's
Halloween
movies.

Random Fact
Alex in *A*
Clockwork
Orange's
all-white outfit
came about
because
McDowell
happened to
have some
cricket gear
in his car.

Presumably he didn't upbraid you for killing Kirk...

➔ Well, they *did*. When *Star Trek: Generations* came out, the internet was in its infancy, and I didn't know anything about it. But my nephew [Alexander Siddig], who was in *Deep Space Nine*, called me and said, "Your life's been threatened." I went, "God almighty! What, for killing him? They should be fucking thrilled!" So when I went to New York for the premiere, they assigned two LAPD detectives. My wife and I went out at 10 o'clock to go for a meal, and the detective was in the corridor... nobody there! We come out onto Madison Avenue... not one person on the street. I went, "Why don't you take off?", and he went "I can't, sorry." It was such a joke, but nobody knew whether to take it seriously, because the internet was in its very early days.

Do you believe in the supernatural?

➔ No, I'm very sceptical. In the war, my mother ran a little hotel in Brighton with her sister. They had this Polish general staying there – it was all black market stuff, a lot of drinking involved. They always told the story of this general being on the phone, and my aunt was on the extension and went "Wooooooo!" and all this stuff, which freaked out the Polish general – who was, I'm sure, completely plastered. So I've always thought, "Well, it's probably my Aunt Vera..." Vera and Edna [his mother] – you can't beat those two.

They sound like quite a pair.

➔ Actually, I got to play my aunt on American TV, and my mother was played by Billy Connolly! I was at my sister's, and I got a camcorder and said, "Okay, after lunch I'm gonna do this interview – I want to know the family history." I set up two chairs, and my aunt goes, "Oh, I shouldn't have had that second glass of white port!" They were giggling, and it started off quite fun. Then suddenly it sort of turned. They went back to childhood, and all these bad feelings started to come out. And in the middle of it the dog came, that had caught a rabbit, and put it under her chair! "Auntie, I think you've got a bleeding dead rabbit under your chair..." It was just priceless, and I played the tape for the writers of the show we were doing [sitcom *Pearl*]. Billy was playing my brother. Anyway, we'd been cancelled, so we said, "Fuck it, let's have some fun," and did them: Vera and Edna. Billy had a big beard! And I do *not* look good in drag... ●

Truth Seekers is streaming now on Amazon Prime Video.

“This is not
ha-ha funny, it’s
gentle humour
that’s very much
character-
bound”

WHEN WE WAS

FAB



55 YEARS AGO,
GERRY ANDERSON
BROUGHT HIS MOST
ENDURING CREATION TO
THE SCREEN, PRESENTING
THE ADVENTURES OF
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE.
SO HOW COME
THUNDERBIRDS
JUST KEEPS ON GOING
AFTER SIX DECADES? *SFX*
ASKS GERRY'S SON JAMIE

WORDS: **ALISTAIR MCGOWN**

A FORMATIVE INFLUENCE FOR generations of British sci-fi fans, Gerry Anderson's string-bound perennial featured five fantastic, futuristic rescue craft bankrolled by millionaire ex-astronaut Jeff Tracy and crewed by his square-jawed sons Scott, Virgil, Alan, Gordon and John, working from their secret Pacific base, Tracy Island.

Keeper of the Anderson legacy is son Jamie Anderson. Would he agree that *Thunderbirds* is his dad's most enduring creation? He laughs at the question. "If I said anything other than that, people would think I was taking the piss! No, it absolutely is, certainly in the UK. If you say *Thunderbirds*, people know Gerry Anderson. If you say Gerry Anderson, people know *Thunderbirds*."

When *Thunderbirds* came along in 1965, Gerry's team – including second wife Sylvia – had already produced futuristic children's series *Supercar*, *Fireball XLS* and *Stingray*, backed by the generosity of TV mogul Lew Grade. As *Stingray* launched on ITV in autumn 1964, filming had already begun on its successor, working title *International Rescue*. Its final name would come via Gerry's late elder brother Lionel, an RAF flyer posted Stateside during World War Two, who'd appeared in the background of 1942 film *Thunder Birds*. The show's concept, meanwhile, had been inspired by the Lengede German mine rescue of November 1963.

Thunderbirds issued warnings on the perils of fully-automated technology, with grand follies such as monorails or forest-felling machines usually ending in a satisfying explosion. But the show's family-friendly carnage – in which not even the bad guys died – made eminently suitable teatime fare.

When Anderson screened the first half-hour episode for his boss in late December 1964, ➔

Grade declared, "This isn't a television series – this is a movie!", handing Gerry the daunting task of doubling the nine episodes already filmed to an hour in length. The subsequent padding, with tangential subplots, gave expanded roles for subsidiary characters such as stammering inventor Brains and in particular aristocratic secret agent Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward and hangdog-faced chauffeur Parker. The sophisticated Lady P took *Thunderbirds* into the arena of James Bond-style espionage.

After first airing on 30 September 1965, *Thunderbirds* quickly became a craze, with a merchandising empire springing up long before anyone talked of "franchises". A second series went into production from March 1966, but Grade's gamble in playing the US networks off against each other brought the empire crashing down, after he turned down a massive \$7 million from NBC and their rivals passed. Grade cancelled *Thunderbirds* after just six more episodes, pinning his hopes on a network sale for an entirely new show. The far less cosy *Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons* duly began filming in January 1967.

Thunderbirds' truncated autumn 1966 series ended with a Christmas Day special. Though Anderson enjoyed many future successes, there was a feeling Grade had killed the goose that laid the golden egg.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Yet the show refused to die, with reruns in each successive decade garnering new generations of fans. In 1991, BBC Two repeats suddenly became one of TV's hottest properties, with a Matchbox Tracy Island playset becoming the must-have toy for Christmas 1992.

Then aged seven, Jamie Anderson sensed something odd happening to these ancient shows he'd seen on VHS. "Suddenly my school friends were watching these episodes, and their parents were rewatching them and bringing in '60s TV21 annuals for Dad to sign. It was all very new, him becoming a celebrity like that."

So why was *Thunderbirds* his father's most enduring show? "Dad was asked that multiple times," ponders Anderson. "He'd always say, 'If I could answer that, I'd apply the formula to everything else and have a winner every time!'"

Was the killer format having five cool craft designs instead of just one? "Well, later in *Captain Scarlet* you've got loads of vehicles, so probably not," muses Anderson. "You could keep breaking it down to a molecular level. So, multiple craft, yes. Thunderbird 2 with the modular element, that's a fantastic choice... The colour palette of the craft, each having their own specific form and function..."

Anderson argues there was no ulterior motive here, though. "I don't think for one minute they sat down and thought, 'Right, we

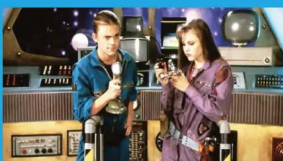
INTERNATIONAL REBOOTS

The series' enduring legacy includes numerous reimaginings



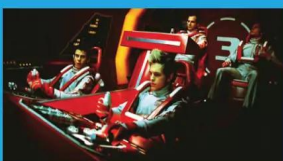
5... THUNDERBIRDS 2086 (1986)

Made without Gerry's involvement, this 13-episode Japanese anime series featured an expanded fleet of 17 craft.



4... TURBOCHARGED THUNDERBIRDS (1994)

Abysmal American repackaging of original episodes using ironic linking material from two futuristic American teens.



3... THUNDERBIRDS (2004)

Jonathan Frakes directed this campy live-action big screen remake. Gerry Anderson declared it "The biggest load of crap I have ever seen in my entire life."



2... THUNDERBIRDS 1965 (2015)

Kickstarter-funded, entirely authentic puppet recreations by fan Stephen La Riviere, with a soundtrack from '60s albums.

1... THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO! (2015-20)

Made after Gerry's death, this faithful, BAFTA-nominated TV revival mixed CGI craft and characters with model sets.



want toys, so let's have five main craft."

Which is possibly how producers would develop a show now? "Exactly," he agrees. "You'd say, 'We need to sell £100 million-worth of toys, so how are we going to do that?' Instantly it's lost any true soul it ever had."

Anderson also points to the show's altruistic heart. "It has a utopian view, with a selfless family doing great things with cool tech. It came from a genuine place. People use the word 'authentic' all the time now – it's become meaningless and artificial – but Dad was absolutely in awe of this rescue operation going on in Germany, so it came from a real place of fascination.

"Loads of Dad's team had been in the RAF or were fascinated with aviation and space flight," he continues, considering their essential input. "It was 100 people who loved filmmaking; in puppets, special effects, model-making. It was a truly passionate cottage industry where they'd perfected their art. They had the perfect amount of runway to then take off, essentially."

Anderson also argues that part of *Thunderbirds*' family appeal was the family at its core. "All of Dad's prior shows had a bit of a family vibe, but *Thunderbirds* is the only one that has a real family at the heart of it."

That family contrasts with his father's own, he explains. "If you look at the Tracy family set-up, and most of the families in Anderson series, there's no mother, because Dad had a terrible relationship with his mum, who was a deeply unpleasant woman. When [elder brother] Lionel was killed, she said [to Gerry], 'Why couldn't it have been you?' If that's not a reason to eliminate all mother figures from all shows going forward, I don't know what is!

"But if there's a father figure, it's a strong one – something lacking in Dad's own life.





Dignity, and woodworm, ran in the family.



Just popping down the shop for some baccy.



Dinky Toy immortality awaits on eBay.



"All fur coat and no knickers, m'lady?"

His father Joe was a meek and mild-mannered man. Not to paint him in any negative light, but Dad didn't have that strong father figure growing up. So, you're creating these idealistic families and you have strong, powerful father figures at the head like Jeff Tracy."

The Tracys' heroism was also rooted in Gerry's upbringing. "He never got over the loss of his brother, so why not create a family of heroic brothers? He was basically trying to live up to his hero vision of Lionel. Scott clearly has his roots in Lionel; a similar character is present in every single Anderson show, pretty much. I think subconsciously he was always bringing him back in."

Anderson suggests that timing was also part of *Thunderbirds*' success. "After five years, not only had they got to a point where the puppets looked great and the performances were lovely, but they'd also primed a big fanbase who knew what to expect, but were still wowed because it was the next step on. Their technical proficiency had reached a peak. [Effects supervisor] Derek Meddings had become a complete master, and everything looked better than anything else on TV at the time – a lot of it still stands up against anything that can be done now."

Thunderbirds was Gerry Anderson's last true marionette series, with a switch to human proportions and more realistic motion on *Captain Scarlet*, and the wobbly heads and inimitable walks replaced with limited motions and nods. Eagle-eyed fans have, however, spotted a shift to a more restrained puppetry style and highly detailed sets within

Thunderbirds' brief second block. "You can see that 'second series' of *Thunderbirds* as making all the changes except the puppets," Anderson concurs. "Every break between series was a time to take stock and look at possible improvements. I'm not sure that necessarily makes it any better, but it shows you that desire to constantly improve."

MIXED FEELINGS

Gerry Anderson's restless drive to move forward with new shows inevitably meant he could be ambivalent about his most famous creation. What did he make of *Thunderbirds*' '90s revival?

"It was a bit of a full circle thing; after the partnership with Lew dissolved, the rights went with ITC and he became disconnected from it," explains Anderson. "After *Terrahawks* in the mid-'80s, things were quiet and Mum [Gerry's third wife, Mary] and Dad took over ITC merchandise licensing. Around 1986/87 his attempts to make *Space Police* weren't getting much traction, so the licensing became key. In 1991 they were gazumped over the rights and it was taken away from them at a difficult time when they needed the cash."

Anderson lost the rights just as *Thunderbirds* merchandise became huge again. "At that point, *Thunderbirds* had become a bit toxic and negative to Dad. He felt, 'Everybody talks about that old show that I don't own, I want to do new stuff! I don't have any control of it, what am I gonna do?'"

"He ended up working in advertising to pay the bills. When it came back a part of him thought, 'Oh god, here we go again. People asking me about this old show that I can't use to my advantage.' Initially he was almost embarrassed. But then it started opening doors

on what would become his next series, *Space Precinct*.

"Dad went from being very proud of *Thunderbirds*, to it becoming a bit of a millstone around his neck, to it becoming a

source of negativity, to it relaunching the final phase of his career. He came to appreciate that it didn't necessarily typecast him as 'that puppet guy' and looked upon it favourably eventually, though it took him a few years after that revival to really say, 'This is my calling card' rather than 'This is a problem for me'. He finally came to accept his fate as 'Mr *Thunderbirds*'."

Gerry Anderson sadly passed away on 26 December 2012, aged 83, but his shows, and in particular *Thunderbirds*, live on. ●

Visit gerryanderson.co.uk for updates, including Jamie Anderson's weekly podcast. *Thunderbirds* is available on DVD/Blu-ray and BritBox.

“It was 100 people who loved filmmaking; in puppets, special effects, model-making”

Brought



To Book

YOON HA LEE

The American-Korean writer can't visualise, but he sure can imagine...

Words by Jonathan Wright

WHAT EXACTLY DOES IT MEAN TO SEE a scene in the mind's eye? It's one of the questions that keyed off Yoon Ha Lee's *Phoenix Extravagant*. At the novel's centre lies a painter, Gyeon Jebi, yet Lee is someone who "really cannot visualise things at all", a condition known as aphantasia.

"When people read a book, and say, 'Oh, yeah, I see a movie inside my head,' I thought for the longest time that they were pulling my leg," he explains. "Then I talked to my husband and he's like, 'Yeah, I see a movie inside my head.' I said, 'You're pulling my leg,' and he's like, 'No, it's really happened.' So [in the book] I try to imagine what that experience was like."

Lee goes on to explain how he paints watercolours "as a hobbyist". This focus on the visual arts seems like new territory for someone who made his name writing military SF with the *Machineries Of Empire* sequence. An early iteration of the novel was set during the Renaissance. "I got 40,000 words into it and realised that I'd written the wrong setting," deadpans Lee.

Instead, the finished book, which also deals with "colonialism and cultural imperialism", is set in a fantasy take on Korea during the Japanese occupation of 1910-1945. "My grandparents lived through that era," says the American-Korean Lee, "and it's kind of awkward to talk about, because a lot of the Koreans who survived that period of history did so by collaborating."

In part, the fantasy setting was chosen because he "didn't want to dredge up old history". The plot deals with Jebi's plans to liberate a dragon automaton, Arazi: a "gollum", controlled by mystical sigils painted by artists like Jebi.

STRANGE DAYS

This fusing of fantasy and SF also ran through the *Machineries Of Empire* trilogy, which began with *Ninefox Gambit* (2016). Here, an especially boggling flight of fancy was the idea of a "consensus reality" where "certain laws of physics are activated" when people share calendars.

"People have pointed out that this isn't how science works in the real world," says Lee. However, the underlying idea of using calendars to control people isn't so fanciful. Referencing a book called *War On The Mind: The Military Uses And Abuses Of Psychology*, he says, "There was a period when the American military was compiling a list of Indochinese religious holidays, because they figured that if

BIODATA

From
Houston, Texas

Greatest Hits
Lee's debut
Ninefox Gambit
won the 2017
Locus Award for
Best First Novel.
He's also written
for a YA
readership with
Dragon Pearl,
part of the Rick
Riordan Presents
series, an imprint
that specialises
in "diverse,
mythology-
based fiction".

Random Fact
Lee and family
fence together,
a sport he took
up after writing
a scene in
Ninefox Gambit
that was "kind
of terrible, because
I had no idea how
swordplay
works".



they attacked on certain ones, they could cause more panic and consternation than would otherwise be the case." The notion of ethnomathematics – "the way that mathematics and culture intersect with each other" – also played in.

Then there's the way that the books were, in Lee's words, "really queer". It's no coincidence that Gyeon Jebi is non-binary, referred to throughout as "they". The idea of inclusivity is important to Lee – himself transgender, though as he's previously told SFX, this isn't important to understanding his work.

"I wanted to have a non-binary character as a protagonist who'd have a somewhat happy ending, and not get killed and not be villainous," he says. "Nothing sophisticated."

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Perhaps not, but Lee's SF is hugely sophisticated and, in part because of its mix of cultural influences, distinctive. As a child, he divided his time between Texas and Korea, the one culture self-consciously expansive, the other "very Confucian". In Korea, he "would constantly be getting in trouble for not observing the etiquette properly, because politeness and respect for your elders are very big in Korean culture". In the USA, meanwhile, he once asked an unimpressed female teacher her age, "because older people are higher up in the social pecking order, so you need to know everyone's age relative to your own so that you can give them the proper respect".

Lee knew he wanted to be a writer early on. "I actually decided to become a writer in third grade, because nobody gives third-graders sound career advice," he says. "I had a third-grade teacher who dressed up in a Spandex costume as 'Storyman'. I think it was probably a Superman costume!"

He took a degree in mathematics "because I knew that it was unlikely that I was going to be able to pay the bills with science fiction writing". His first short story was published in 1999. He "burned" a decade on a fantasy book "trying to get it to cohere" before his now agent pointed out the book's flaws. To fix these, Lee says, would have involved a ground-up rewrite. Instead, he wrote *Ninefox Gambit*.

Lee lives in Louisiana with his astrophysicist husband and their 16-year-old daughter, "who is made of sarcasm, so she's great". He writes in the afternoon, and while he may not be able to see movies playing in his mind when he reads, his own books are as vivid and visual as any in SFF. ●

Phoenix Extravagant is available now, published by Solaris.

“I had a third-grade teacher who dressed up in a Spandex costume as ‘Storyman’”

Harry Potter

WIZARDING
WORLD

STEP ABOARD

it is going to be a bumpy ride!



As seen in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

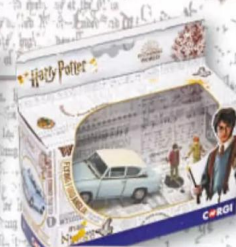


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CAUTION

DEC
2020

edited by Ian Berriman

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POSSESSOR

Killing in the brain of...

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TRUTH SEEKERS

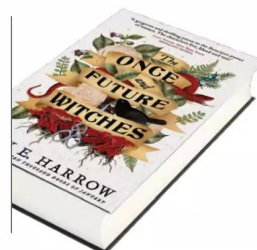
→ Pegg and Frost team up for TV for the first time in 19 years. God, we feel old.



80

DAWN OF THE DEAD

→ George Romero's zombie classic gets a 4K Blu-ray box set to die for.



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THE ONCE AND FUTURE WITCHES

→ Take a trip to New Salem with Alix E Harrow.

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ SUPERB ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ AVERAGE ★★★★★ POOR ★★★★★ TERRIBLE



"Well, I'm here... it looks nothing like the album."

LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

Smoke screen

► SCREENED 7-18 OCTOBER

It was a case of swings and roundabouts for this year's London Film Festival, with "the new normal" deterring in-person attendance but online streams democratising the event. Screening alongside *Possessor* (see right) and *Wolfwalkers* (page 70) were six films of interest to SFX.

Now set to debut on Disney+ at Christmas, Pixar's ***Soul*** (★★★★★) is a jazz-influenced fable about finding your place in the world. Riffing on the company's usual formula, it then freeforms off in unexpected directions to create something extraordinary, emotionally rich and very funny. What other company would make a family-

friendly cartoon about a world-weary music teacher having a midlife crisis? From the photorealistic streets of New York (scored by jazz musician Jon Batiste) to the abstract world of *The Great Before*, where personalities are forged in preparation for life (scored by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross), it's an excitingly weird clash of audio and visual styles that hits all the right notes.

British horror ***Rose: A Love Story*** (★★★★★) finds an untapped vein of vampirism by framing it as a medical condition requiring a partner to act as a carer, and interrogating what that might mean. In the case of Sam (*Misfits*' Matt Stokoe, who also scripted) and Rose (Sophie

FESTIVAL REPORT

Rundle), it's living in total seclusion and using leeches to supply her feeds.

The couple's loving but strained relationship is wholly credible, and as we wait for things to fall apart – this is a tragedy, Sam's temper his fatal flaw – it gets horribly tense. The refusal to supply backstory or an explosive finale may frustrate, but it remains a touching chamber piece.

Featuring credits for "maypole choreographer" and "frog voice", Abel Ferrara's ***Siberia*** (★★★★★) is more what you'd expect from Lars von Trier than the man behind *Bad Lieutenant*. Kicking off in a Siberian cabin, it soon devolves into a hallucinatory Jungian odyssey, as Clint (Willem Dafoe) leads his husky sled

through various zones – death camp, cave full of "demons", desert – encountering his younger self, ex-wife, mother, and father (also Dafoe). Expect gnomic statements and much screwing of considerably younger women.

It's amusingly odd and Dafoe's craggy rockface features are always magnetic, but it's hard to escape the feeling that you've intruded on a midlife-crisis therapy session.

The title of German director Christian Petzold's ***Undine*** (★★★★★) is not only the female protagonist's name, but another term for a water nymph. This ill-fated romance between a professional diver (Franz Rogowski) and a historian (Paula Beer) is no *Splash*, being

“Much screwing of younger women”



Tape tricks:
Caroline
Catz as Delia
Derbyshire.



Undine:
"What are you
looking at,
creep?"

firmly grounded in banal reality; you might need to pinch yourself during torpor-inducing scenes where Undine delivers lectures on the history of Berlin's urban development. Thankfully the central performances are sensitive, the key twists arrive untelegraphed, and some of the underwater sequences – particularly one where Undine hitches a ride with a giant catfish – gloomily phantasmagorical.

Acoustics nerds and *Berberian Sound Studio* fans should get the most out of slow-burn Argentinean thriller **The Intruder** (★★★★☆), which makes sinister use of background noise picked up during studio recording. Érica Rivas plays a fiery voice artist/soprano who's warned that an entity is trying to cross over via

her dreams. The film's slippages between reality and dream are effectively tricky, and if you're sufficiently eagle-eyed to spot the clues you can expect the satisfaction of self-congratulation, but there's some clumsy use of an expository figure, and the joyous finale is a little questionable.

Finally, BBC Four seems the likely destination for **Delia Derbyshire: The Myths and Legendary Tapes** (★★★★☆), a drama/documentary for the *Arena* strand. Writer/director Caroline Catz also portrays the alchemist of sound who realised the *Doctor Who* theme.

Flitting between dramatisations, interviews with collaborators, and footage of industrial music pioneer Cozey Fanni Tutti (who's working with tapes found in Derbyshire's attic), the film at times feels rather unfocused. A veil is also drawn over most of Derbyshire's life post-BBC Radiophonic Workshop – such as her struggles with depression and drink. Still, these disparate elements do build a more rounded picture of Derbyshire's personality than the fusty B&W TV clips on which her public image has been built; it's far more surprising than it should be to realise that she smoked joints and (gasp) had a love life.

Ian Berriman/Dave Golder (*Soul*)

i Cozey Fanni Tutti is writing a book inspired by her sense of connection with Delia Derbyshire. It's due in spring 2022.

"Be right there, I'm just putting my face on."



POSSESSOR

The Killer Inside Me



★★★★★

▶ RELEASED 27 NOVEMBER

18 | 103 minutes

▶ Director Brandon Cronenberg

▶ Cast Christopher Abbott, Andrea Riseborough, Rossif Sutherland, Tuppence Middleton

➤ **Brandon Cronenberg's debut**

Antiviral suggested it; his belated second writer/director credit confirms it. Fans of his father's early work can quit carping about Cronenberg Senior leaving provocative genre movies behind, because Junior is more than capable of filling the gap.

Okay, this Philip K Dick-ian hitman tale isn't *quite* as perverse as peak David, but it's still a heady brew. Andrea Riseborough plays Tasya Vos (a Cronenberg character name if ever we heard one), an assassin who uses brain-implant tech to inhabit the body of someone close to the mark and first establish a plausible narrative. Unfortunately, the identity of her latest unwitting host ends up fighting back...

It's not an entirely original conceit (*Altered Carbon* recently had sport with similar themes), but it's a fascinating one, and while

Cronenberg's treatment doesn't cop from pop's CV there are faint echoes of it (particularly *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*).

The habitually haunted-faced Riseborough is a good fit for Vos, her pain so close to the surface that she's practically see-through. Christopher Abbott makes a decent fist of the tricky role of a woman inside a man's body, play-acting his identity.

Suffused in washes of red and blue light, and drenched in blood, with a soundtrack of wind-whipping-round-tower-block howls and pounding drums, it's by turns breathtakingly stylish and gasp-inducingly pitiless. The key killings are wince-inducingly brutal, and good use is made of fairly rudimentary practical effects to convey the nightmarish confusion of two identities at war. (Someone could make a killing merchandising "distorted Riseborough face" masks.)

The results couldn't have been more accomplished if daddy had jacked in to revisit his glory days.

Ian Berriman

i One inspiration was *Physical Control Of The Mind*, a 1969 book on using electrodes to stimulate animal and human brains.

Reviews

CINEMA



WOLFWALKERS

Girls Just Wanna Have Fur

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 103 minutes

► Directors **Tomm Moore, Ross Stewart**

► Cast **Honor Kneafsey, Eva Whittaker, Sean Bean, Simon McBurney**

❖ **From Cartoon Saloon, makers** of the lovely Oscar-nominated fantasy *Song Of The Sea*, comes this terrific animated period adventure. It's set in Ireland in 1650, under the heavy hand of Oliver Cromwell. The action is split between the bustling town of Kilkenny and the surrounding woods, where beasts and legends lurk. Cromwell has appointed a wolf-hunter, voiced by Sean Bean.

He's a gentle-hearted father with more than a little resemblance to Ned Stark. His lively daughter is Robin, who soon encounters a wild, magic girl in

the woods, called Mebh, who commands a wolf pack. Mebh is hilariously mouthy and joyously feral, especially as her "wolfwalker" powers let her become a wolf at night – a power she inadvertently gives to Robin.

The girls' friendship is shown funnily and lovingly, with a sublime central sequence where they dart through the magic forest as wolves, bonding through the joy of movement. The film has the same fantastic aesthetic as *Song Of The Sea*: ornamental and deliberately flattened, with many images having an Escher-like intricacy. The exciting action is underpinned by strong emotional stakes and a battle between paganism and Puritanism.

The cruel Cromwell works less well. The script stresses that he sees himself as the hero (think Thanos in *Avengers*), but the other characters twinkle so brightly that he seems leaden among them. But *Wolfwalkers* never depends on the baddie; its two female leads make the film by themselves. **Tom Arden**

i An *Art Of Wolfwalkers* book featuring hand-drawn sketches, paintings and cast/crew interviews is out on 10 November.

“There’s a sublime central sequence”



TRAIN TO BUSAN PRESENTS PENINSULA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 6 NOVEMBER**

(Blu-ray/DVD/download

30 November)

15 | 116 minutes

► Director **Yeon Sang-ho**

► Cast **Dong-Won Gang, Jung-hyun Lee, Re Lee**

❖ **Tense Korean horror *Train***

To Busan (2016) followed a group of passengers struggling to survive after an outbreak of speedster zombies. This follow-up is set in the same world, but works on its own.

Four years on, the Korean peninsula has been quarantined, but four refugees who found safe haven in Hong Kong are lured back by a job to recover \$20 million in cash from an abandoned truck.

The premise is pure John Carpenter, and that's not all that feels familiar. On discovering a rogue army unit holed up in a mall, our heroes must contend with a gladiatorial arena where the living are pitted against the infected. George Romero got there first on every detail of that sentence. When a character paraphrases "Come with me if you want to live", it's clear that originality was not a concern.

Propulsive action is the focus, and often it feels like you're watching a videogame, with a young heroine driving improbably like a pro, mowing down countless bodies. It's also shamelessly sentimental at times; when the stirring strings kick-in you may feel like gagging. Still, its overgrown Incheon is effectively realised and its *Fury Road*-esque demolition derby car chases are diverting enough – just quickly forgotten. **Ian Berriman**

SPACE DOGS: RETURN TO EARTH

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 6 NOVEMBER**

U | 80 minutes

❖ **The third in Russia's** toddler-friendly *Space Dogs* franchise makes the strange decision to remove its canine cosmonaut heroes from space and drop them in the ocean: aliens are stealing Earth's water, and it's up to pooches Strelka and Belka to stop them. There's a catchy jellyfish song and it's good to see two female leads, but there's just too much noise, movement and exposition for the young audience to have a clue about the plot. **Jayne Nelson**



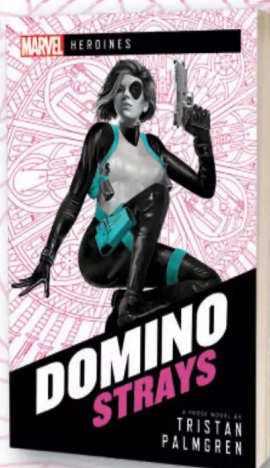
ALSO + OUT



We'd love to give you our verdict on **THE CRAFT: LEGACY** (out now), but no screeners were made available for this followup to the '90s witchcraft horror. An embargo also gags us from telling you about **FREAKY** (13 November), the new body-swap horror from the director of *Happy Death Day* (see page 38). There's yet another version of **CHRISTMAS CAROL** imminent (20 November). This one features dancers, stylised sets, and voiceover by the likes of Martin Freeman. Finally, Neil Marshall's soldiers vs werewolves horror **DOG SOLDIERS** has had a 4K reissue.

MARVEL

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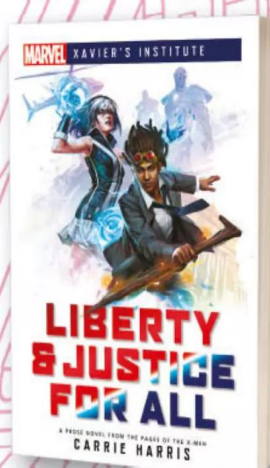


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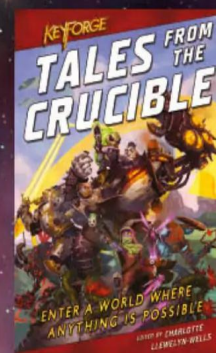
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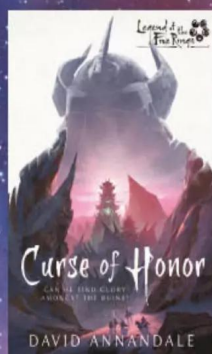
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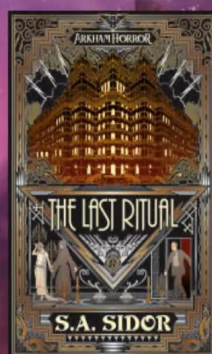
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Reviews


TV




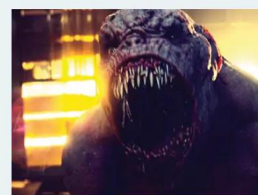
DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...


 Christina shows up and says something annoyingly enigmatic to the family.


 A scene of '50s America is scored with 2000s hip-hop and electronica.

 There's an unexpected sex scene. Well, it is HBO.



 Uh-oh! Shoggoths!

 The show directly references the book, *Lovecraft Country*.

 One of the heroes discovers a previously unknown capacity for extreme violence within themselves.

LOVECRAFT COUNTRY Season One

African-American Horror Story



UK Sky Atlantic, finished/streaming now on Now TV

US Streaming now on HBO Max

► Showrunner Misha Green

► Cast Jonathan Majors, Jurnee

Smollett, Wunmi Mosaku,

Michael K Williams

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 **Matt Ruff's 2016** novel *Lovecraft Country* seemed tailor-made for TV adaptation. It's a shame, then, that while HBO's big-budget adaptation is a gorgeously crafted, superbly cast show, it's also something of a confused mess.

It starts strongly with "Sundown", which elegantly sets out the show's stall. A young black man, Atticus Freeman (Jonathan Majors), returns home to Chicago after serving in the Korean War. His father has vanished, but a mysterious letter points Atticus to a mansion in Massachusetts. Cue a hazardous road trip through Jim Crow-era America, where Tic and his friend Leti (Jurnee Smollett) face racial prejudice and eldritch creatures from beyond in equal measure. The real horror here, of course, isn't the shoggoths, but everyday prejudice.

That's demonstrated in the episode's best scene, where Atticus, Leti and George (Courtney B Vance) are forced into a slow-motion car chase across county lines by a tailgating sheriff who intends to lynch them. It is legitimately terrifying. When the CGI monsters show up a few minutes later, it's almost a relief, as a respite from something horribly real.

Unfortunately, moments like that are rare. Instead, the show has a tendency to take a maximalist, more-is-always-better approach, to the point of incoherence. Episode two, "Whitey's On The Moon", crams half-a-season's worth of incident into a single episode, including: a main character death, a main character resurrection, hallucinatory sex, a sinister cult, big explosions and a cow giving birth to a monster. Likewise, the season finale is packed full of series-shaking incident, but after a while it just becomes noise, and none of it is as memorable as that car chase.

The frustrating thing is that the show is clearly capable of greatness. "Strange Case" follows Ruby (Wunmi Mosaku – the standout member of an excellent ensemble) as she makes a deal with the season's villains and starts living life as a white woman.

It's the sort of tale this show is designed for, rich with insight, horror and humour, while centring the experiences of black women. Likewise "I Am", which sends Hippolyta (Aunjanue Ellis) on an interdimensional journey that's visually striking and moving. And "A History Of Violence" is fun, turning the show into *National Treasure*-style adventure.

The rest of the time, *Lovecraft Country* is just okay; there's a weird disconnect between its horny, gory, late-period *True Blood* goofiness and its sincere attempts at meaning. Hopefully season two will remedy that.

Will Salmon

i Matt Ruff originally envisaged *Lovecraft Country* as an *X-Files*-inspired episodic TV show, rather than as a novel.

THE HAUNTING OF BLY MANOR

There's A Ghost In Bly House



UK/US Streaming on Netflix now

► Creator Mike Flanagan

► Cast Victoria Pedretti, Oliver Jackson-Cohen, Amelia Eve, Rahul Kohli

EPISODES 1.01-1.09 **Mike Flanagan's**

latest reinvention of a classic of horror literature has a broader remit than simply adapting *The Turn Of The Screw*, as the opening credit "based on the work of Henry James" makes clear. It retains the essence of his 1898 novella, with two young children possessed by the spirits of a former governess/au pair and her lover (unlike in the story, there is no ambiguity on this point). But in episode eight the series also tackles James's story "The Romance Of Certain Old Clothes".

Set largely in 1987, this intricately nested narrative has the same MO employed to great

success on *The Haunting Of Hill House*, with Flanagan layering additional stories on top of his literary framework. Minor mysteries are resolved several episodes later. There are "ghosts"

which aren't really ghosts, characters who are dead but don't realise it, and ingenious editing, with characters walking through a door in one time and arriving in another. The approach is just as



Adults should be seen and not heard, apparently.

mature and heartfelt, with Flanagan again using ghosts to explore themes of love, loss and family dysfunction.

So why doesn't it work as well? Perhaps simply because all these devices are now familiar. Perhaps because the series often takes its sweet time to get to the point. Perhaps because while repetition can be eerie, it can also be, well... just repetitious.

It doesn't help that it seems to be set in a parallel universe England. Notebooks out, North American producers: we don't eat "mac and cheese" sandwiches, display huge Union flags in our classrooms, or use the word "math". Oh, and please hire a dialogue coach who can prevent your narrator's accent oscillating between Queen's Speech RP and Two Ronnies-sketch Yorkshireman. Because the UK audience is unlikely to shiver with fright while they're rolling their eyes. **Ian Berriman**

i The grounds of Bly Manor were set up on a farm; the house itself was just shipping containers with greenscreen over it.

TRUTH SEEKERS Series One

The Install Guy



UK/US Amazon Prime, streaming now

► Creators Nick Frost, Simon Pegg

► Cast Nick Frost, Samson Kayo, Emma D'Arcy, Susan Wokoma

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **We're always**

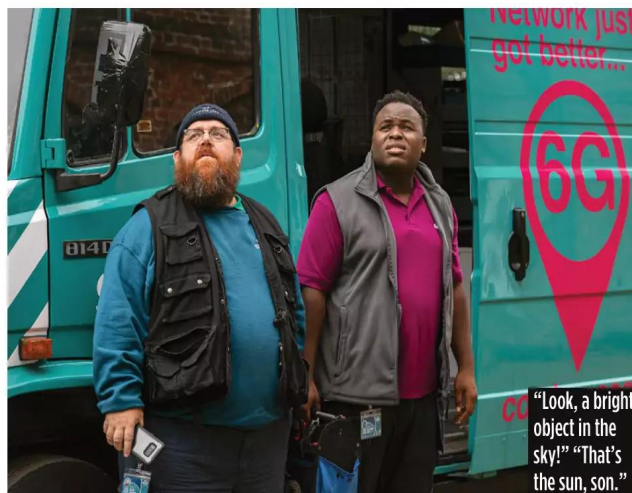
delighted to see Simon Pegg and Nick Frost teaming up again, but sadly this latest outing falls some way short of their best work.

The basic premise is sound enough (well, if you can forgive a nationwide broadband provider being run like it has about 20 employees): Frost plays Gus, a Wi-Fi installer and amateur ghost hunter caught up in an increasing number of weird paranormal situations after being paired with new partner Elton (Samson Kayo).

The characters are all likeable, but Susan Wokoma (as Elton's agoraphobic sister) and Malcolm McDowell (as Gus's crotchety

father-in-law) feel wasted in peripheral roles which don't give them much to do. An episode length of 25 minutes provides little time to flesh out episodic stories, so much of the dramatic incident

feels insubstantial. It doesn't help that Gus is often quick to move on from their latest adventure; what kind of ghost hunter gets menaced by a possessed doll, then just leaves it behind?



"Look, a bright object in the sky!" "That's the sun, son."

It's a series which slowly accretes meaning as we map connections, and the interest level steps up significantly in episode four, once an arc plot concerning the sinister machinations of Julian Barratt's Dr Peter Toynbee properly kicks in. Toynbee's sociopathic indifference to the followers he exploits is the funniest thing about the series,

“Little time to flesh out stories”

and you'll find yourself wishing for a return to this continuing thread whenever the series strays from it. But even that doesn't really pay off, with both the specifics of Toynbee's goal and the full significance of major revelations in the final episode left frustratingly unclear. **Ian Berriman**

i The old Shredded Wheat factory where the finale was shot is 10 minutes' walk from three pubs used in *The World's End*.

Reviews

TV

STAR TREK: LOWER DECKS Season One

Phasers drawn

★★★★★

US CBS All Access, streaming now

UK Still TBC, annoyingly...

► Creator Mike McMahan

► Cast Tawny Newsome, Jack Quaid, Noël Wells, Eugene Cordero

EPISODES 1.01-1.10 *Star Trek* last ventured into the cartoon frontier with *The Animated Series* in 1973-74, but *Lower Decks* is a very different kettle of ceti eels – the kind that likes to drop references to things like ceti eels as often as possible.

Created by *Rick And Morty* writer Mike McMahan, it's an adult animated comedy throwing a spotlight on the grunts who do the menial tasks on board the USS Cerritos, a ship specialising in

Second Contact (basically all the paperwork left after First Contact). What ambitious young Lieutenant Brad Boimler (voiced by *The Boys'* Jack Quaid) doesn't realise, though, is that co-worker Ensign Beckett Mariner (Tawny Newsome) is actually the Captain's daughter. She's secretly slumming it because she sees the bridge officers as glory-hunting Federation apologists, and she wonderfully lampoons the franchise's more idealistic values at every opportunity.

It's odd to see the bridge crew in support roles, but not having to flesh them out means that the double-fist-clobbering, Kirk-inspired Number One Jack Ransom (Jerry O'Connell), and

"Yeah, we found your Neelix slash fiction."



the phaser-happy Bajoran security officer Lieutenant Shaxs (Fred Tatasciore), become the subject of some great running gags.

If you're not a *Star Trek* fan, *Lower Decks* is amiable enough: funny but not hilarious, at times a little shouty. But if you get the references – and the show is absolutely stuffed with them – then you're on a whole other level

of entertainment. There's everything from guest appearances by *Trek* royalty to throwaway mentions to franchise minutiae like Xon, cetacean ops and the Vendorians (only previously featured in, uh, the first animated series). **Dave Golder**

i The USS Titan makes its on-screen debut in the finale; its design was decided back in 2005 by a publisher competition.

WELCOME TO THE BLUMHOUSE

Not-so-fantastic four

★★★★★

UK/US Amazon Prime, streaming now

► Directors Emmanuel Osei-Kuffour, Veena Sud, Zu Quirke, Elan and Rajeev Dassani

► Cast Mamoudou Athie, Peter Sarsgaard, Sydney Sweeney, Sunita Mani

➦ **Given the name Blumhouse**, you'd be forgiven for assuming that this four-pack of releases, put out under the Blumhouse Television banner (hence their presence on this page) are horror movies. Unfortunately, they're not; at best, they're slightly horror-flavoured, in a safe-for-granny way. They're also a bit rubbish.

Black Box is a sci-fi thriller in which an amnesiac (Mamoudou

Athie) allows an eccentric scientist (Phylicia Rashad) to plug him into a computer to recover his memories. Unfortunately, it's pretty similar to another recentish release – saying which would be a spoiler, but you'll know it when you see it – except far more stupid.

The Lie sees parents deciding to cover up their teenage daughter's crime. It has a recognisable cast, including Peter Sarsgaard and Joey King, but there's not enough plot to fill the time, and the punchline is groaningly awful.

Nocturne promises Faustian shenanigans as an ambitious music student (Sydney Sweeney) plays from a music book full of demonic doodles, but never delivers on the promise. Instead, it's a non-



"Noooo, it doesn't look silly at all, I promise."

supernatural cautionary tale about high school burnout.

Evil Eye offers at least a glimmer of something spooky, as an over-protective mum (Sarita Choudhury) fears her daughter's boyfriend (Omar Maskati) is the reincarnation of her own former abusive partner, but the horror is drowned by lashings of sentimentality.

The overall vibe is that of a lost season of the '90s *Outer Limits* played at half-speed. It's frustrating: this could've been a great showcase for new talent, but these all just feel like something Jason Blum found down the back of his sofa. **Sarah Dobbs**

i *The Lie* is a remake of a German-language film, 2015's *We Monsters*. It had a festival screening way back in 2018.

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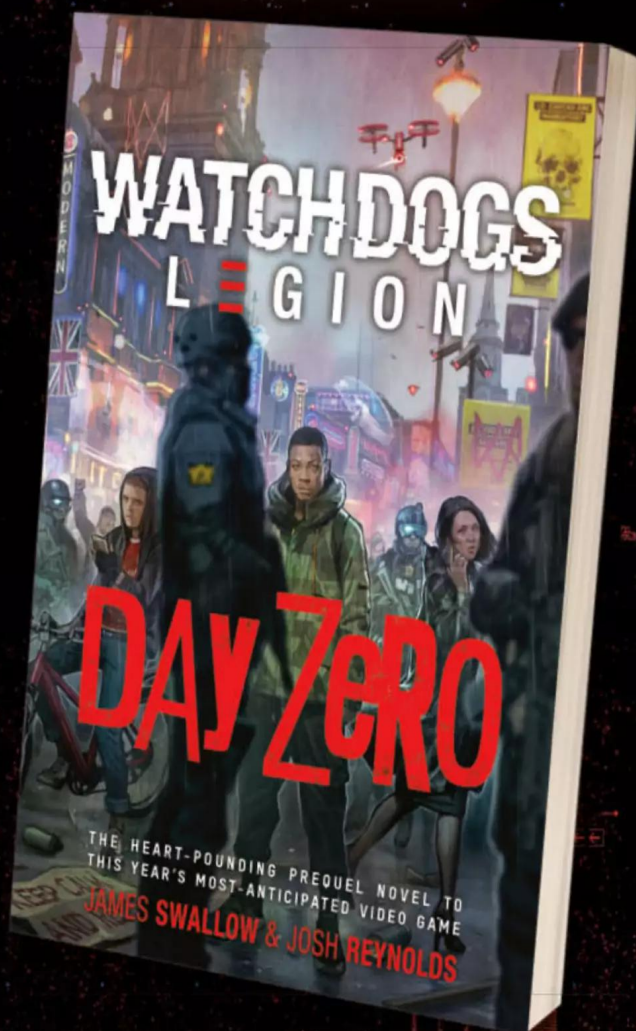
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"I modelled this look on Quality Street."



THE FU MANCHU CYCLE 1965-1969

Let's Talk About Sax

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1965-1969 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Don Sharp,

Jeremy Summers, Jess Franco

▶ Cast Christopher Lee, Tsai Chin, Nigel Green, Howard Marion-Crawford

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Fu Manchu:** always

the most contentious of globe-threatening masterminds. Created by pulp novelist Sax Rohmer in 1913, his original escapades are riddled with British imperial paranoia – some argue outright racism – distilling the perceived threat of Asian expansionism into a single, malevolent mandarin, “the yellow peril incarnate in one man.” He’s a character not exactly designed for 21st century identity politics and Twitter-storms.

This lavish new Blu-ray box set gathers the five *Fu Manchu* films made in the '60s by notorious budget-scraping mogul Harry Alan Towers. A proto Dr No, Rohmer's creation fits the times, plugged into newfound paranoia over the rise of Red China. Newly and impressively restored, the movies themselves are clearly intended as period pieces but to modern eyes they float in a strange netherland between the '20s and the '60s, where vintage cars and London fog co-exist with mod fashions and high-tech lairs.

While the potboiler scripts squander his talents, Christopher Lee makes for an icily suave “devil doctor”, his face a death mask beneath fake epicanthic eyelids. Thankfully there’s no attempt at a

cod Chinese accent – in fact there’s a distinctly nationless vibe to *Fu Manchu* here, the films housing his villainy in everything from an Egyptian tomb to a lost Inca city. Lee brings a great stillness and an unhurried menace that elevates a part barely more than a sinister cipher. Tsai Chin as his daughter, Lin Tang, is ultimately more memorable, all sour sultriness and sadism.

Opening film *The Face Of Fu Manchu* is the strongest of the five, an atmospheric, firm-jawed ripping yarn played with total sincerity by Hammer helmer Don Sharp, who returns for *The Brides Of Fu Manchu*, a less opulent offering cluttered with peripheral characters. Jeremy Summers gives us *The Vengeance Of Fu Manchu*, a pedestrian effort despite authentic location work in the Far East. Jess Franco ups the sleaze quotient for *The Blood Of Fu Manchu* but runs out of energy, perviness and money in franchise-killer *The Castle Of Fu Manchu*, which cannibalises footage from other films, including *Brides*.

“The world shall hear from me again!” vows *Fu Manchu* at the end of each movie. As each dastardly plot collapses it feels

more and more like a hollow threat – never more so than now.

▶ **Extras** Film writers including Kim Newman, Jonathan Rigby and David Flint provide informative commentaries for all but *The Castle Of Fu Manchu* (was no one prepared to sit through it?). The BFI's Vic Pratt, meanwhile, supplies introductions for all five films (six-seven minutes apiece). Also spread across the discs are a series of pundit-fronted featurettes that provide valuable cultural context: the ever-excellent Sir Christopher Frayling on Sax Rohmer and his creation's screen history (48 minutes), Kim Newman on the original novels (20 minutes), Jonathan Rigby on Christopher Lee (49 minutes), and Stephen Thrower on the partnership between Jess Franco and Harry Alan Towers (41 minutes). New interviews focus on clapper loader Ray Andrew (11 minutes), first assistant director Anthony Wayne (five minutes) and *Castle* star Rosalba Neri (13 minutes).

Archival interviews include a career-wide Q&A with Christopher Lee, recorded onstage in 1994 at the NFT (86 minutes) – he also features in a brief news report made during the filming of *Face* – as well as Harry Alan Towers (44 minutes), who's prepared to share more about his sex life (“I just wanted a good screw”) than his high-kitsch oeuvre. There are also archival audio interviews with directors Don Sharp and Jeremy Summers and cinematographer Ernest Steward, ranging across their careers.

A fascinating bonus comes in the form of two chapters from '20s *Fu Manchu* silent cinema serials, with an optional – and terrific – modern score, along with 1966's *The Ghost Of Monk's Island* (82 minutes), a Blythesque Children's Film Foundation serial by *Vengeance* helmer Summers. You also get Super 8 versions of *Face* (16 minutes in total), international title sequences, trailers, colour test footage from *Bride* and galleries as well as a 120-page book, double-sided poster and five replica production stills. **Nick Setchfield**

i *Fu Manchu* appeared in the Marvel comic book universe in the 1970s as the father of Shang-Chi, Master of Kung-Fu.



JEEPERS CREEPERS

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2001 | 15 | Blu-ray & DVD

▶ Director Victor Salva

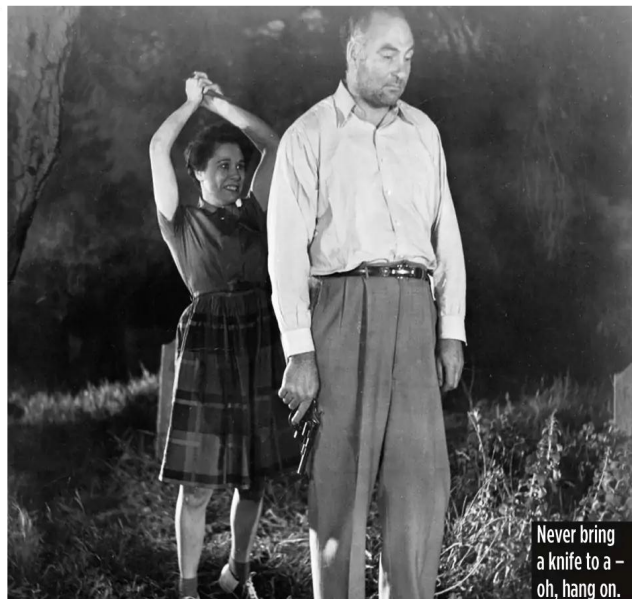
▶ Cast Gina Philips, Justin Long, Patricia Belcher, Jonathan Breck

BLU-RAY DEBUT Like *From Dusk*

Till Dawn before it, *Jeepers Creepers* feels like two films stitched together by a madman. In the first half, we get a *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* riff, a tense psycho-chiller about a body part-collecting maniac who should probably have his driving licence taken away. The less successful second half sees supernatural shenanigans swoop into the story, building to a twist you wouldn't see coming if you had three eyes.

One of the overlooked elements of the plot is an idea nestled within its heart: what if a monster was an artist? This beautiful transfer explores that concept, without touching on its inversion: what if an artist was a monster? Cause if you're expecting any examination of director Victor Salva's past, you won't find it here.

➤ **Extras** The bonuses are ported from Shock Factory's exhaustive release. There's a wealth of info across two fact-filled commentaries, a documentary (36 minutes) and recent interviews with actress Patricia Belcher (16 minutes) and a producer (18 minutes). Plus: the hour-long 2002 *Making Of* (on a DVD disc); 17 minutes of decent deleted scenes; gallery; trailer. Salva cameos as a corpse glued to a wall; his presence lingers here similarly. If you want to get the most from the release, you're stuck with him. **Sam Ashurst**



Never bring a knife to a – oh, hang on.

DEMENTIA Switchblade Sister

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1955 | 12 | Blu-ray & DVD (dual format)

▶ Director John Parker

▶ Cast Adrienne Barrett, Bruno Ve Sota, Ben Roseman, Richard Barron

BLU-RAY DEBUT This directorial

one-off deserves to be bracketed with the similarly off-kilter *Carnival Of Souls* as a salvo from the cinematic margins. It's remarkable that it was shot in 1953, six years before filming began on *Psycho* – and a good 14 years before a young David Lynch first picked up a 16mm camera.

Clocking in at under an hour and featuring zero dialogue and nameless characters, it's a deeply Freudian noir nightmare whose heroine walks through a seedy world bristling with misogynist threat. We follow the switchblade-packing "Gamine" (played by the director's secretary, Adrienne Barrett) as she's latched onto by a pimp, set up with a cigar-smoking "Rich Man"... and ultimately, with the cops in pursuit, hides out in a basement jazz club. Uncanny stocking-faced figures haunt the streets, and dream sequences set in a cemetery.

William C Thompson, cinematographer on *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, was the man behind the camera, but the results are incomparable. What was clearly a penny-pinching budget means that the sets are cramped, but this realm of long shadows looks ravishing. But it's how hard-edged *Dementia* is for its day which really strikes you. The New York State Film Board stymied its release, labelling it "the quintessence of gruesomeness" – what more recommendation do you need?

➤ **Extras** 1957 edit *Daughter Of Horror*, which adds rather cheesy narration, is also included. A before/after featurette underlines how beautifully crisp the 2011 restoration is. With details of production shrouded in mystery, Kat Ellinger's commentary falls back on waffly chin-stroking. "Alone With The Monsters" (16 minutes) is an interesting British experimental short from 1958 that treads similar terrain. Plus: a Joe Dante instalment of *Trailers From Hell*; trailers; gallery. **Ian Berriman**

Daughter Of Horror is the film playing on the screen when the Blob attacks a movie theatre in *The Blob*.



SLEEPWALKERS

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1992 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Mick Garris

▶ Cast Brian Krause, Alice Krige, Mädchen Amick, Dan Martin

BLU-RAY DEBUT One of many

collaborations between writer Stephen King and director Mick Garris, *Sleepwalkers* has a reputation for being slightly rubbish – and it deserves it.

Written as a screenplay without ever first being a novel, it's essentially a feline take on vampire mythology: Mary (Alice Krige) and Charles (Brian Krause) are the titular Sleepwalkers, an incestuous mother/son duo who shapeshift into hideous bipedal cat monsters to feed on virgins. Super-strong and theoretically immortal, they're only vulnerable to cat scratches. Shame, then, that they didn't do their research before moving to a town where the deputy sheriff (Dan Martin) patrols with his cat Clovis in the passenger seat.

The cast is impressive, with Krige having fun slinking about evilly and virgin-in-peril Tanya played with wide-eyed sweetness by Mädchen Amick, but underneath the cat monster prosthetics, the story is as basic as it gets: plodding, predictable and entirely scare-free.

➤ **Extras** Probably more than anyone ever needed to know: two commentaries (one with Garris, Krause and Amick; a new Covid-phoned one with Garris and film historian Lee Gambin), interviews with Garris, Amick, Krause, Krige and the special effects team (63 minutes total), and archival behind-the-scenes footage (seven minutes). Plus: trailer; TV spots; booklet. **Sarah Dobbs**



GEMINI

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1999 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Shinya Tsukamoto

▶ Cast Masahiro Motoki, Ryô, Yasutaka Tsutsui, Masako Motai

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Sadako wasn't** the only one trapped down a well at the end of the '90s: the doctor protagonist of this film ends up in one too, pushed in by an apparent doppelganger who proceeds to steal his life – and wife. Turns out there's a prosaic explanation (the clue's in the title), but Masahiro Motoki remains impressively demonic as the sneering interloper who embodies the flipside of human nature, especially when lit so that he's reduced to glinting eyes and teeth.

Part fairy tale, part melodrama, *Gemini* was something of a departure for Shinya Tsukamoto, director of cyberpunk body horror *Tetsuo*, being a period piece and not an original work – it's based on a short story by Japanese author Edogawa Ranpo. However, it's not entirely uncharacteristic, thanks to bursts of frenetic energy, an approach to costuming and make-up that spurns realism, and a score by regular collaborator Chu Ishikawa which effectively blends industrial electronics and sinister chanting.

▶ **Extras** A Making Of (18 minutes) is just raw behind-the-scenes footage, but does provide interesting glimpses of the well set erected in a Toho Studios car park; a separate behind-the-scenes piece (20 minutes) replicates some of this. Plus: footage from a trip to the Venice Film Festival (17 minutes); make-up demo/interview (six minutes). **Ian Berriman**



BURST CITY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 NOVEMBER**

1982 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Sogo Ishii

▶ Cast Takanori Jinnai, Shinya Ohe, Tsui Tobu, Ko Machida

BLU-RAY DEBUT **This energetic,** chaotic Japanese dystopia may be the most authentically punk of all punk films. Watching it is not unlike being helplessly jammed into a mosh pit, jostled as people scream incoherently in your earhole.

You'll need to look up the plot on Wikipedia afterwards – and probably remain unconvinced. This much is clear: there are gangs hanging out in derelict factories. There are performances by leather-clad bands who yell "It's a toilet of a world!" There is sleazy, abusive bondage sex. There is endless messy, unchoreographed scrapping between punks, bikers, yakuza and riot cops. The penny drops once you learn that the shoot wrapped with up to 60% of the script left unshot, budget exhausted.

It's frustrating, because when the frenzied camerawork reduces everything to an abstract blur, an amphetamine sulphate rush visualised, you can grasp what director Sogo Ishii was aiming for. If only he'd had the discipline to finish the job properly.

▶ **Extras** Ishii proclaims the film to be "a middle finger to the film industry" in a rather long-winded interview (56 minutes), self-shot during lockdown. The lighting director (27 minutes) spills on the disorganisation on-set. Japanese cinema expert Tom Mes evangelises in a commentary track. Plus: trailer; gallery; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



I, MONSTER

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1971 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Stephen Weeks

▶ Cast Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Mike Raven, Susan Jameson

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Why aim for the** screen's most faithful take on Jekyll and Hyde while simultaneously scraping off the serial numbers of Robert Louis Stevenson's original story?

Christopher Lee plays the splintered protagonists here, inexplicably renamed Marlowe and Blake. Strong on Edwardian ambience, with an intriguing Freudian spin, the film ultimately drags. Lee is good value, though, shattering the sombre scowl of his screen persona as the dissolute dark side – even if you can't quite shake the feeling you're watching horror royalty on a gin-soaked bender.

▶ **Extras** Choose between an extended version (81 minutes) and the original theatrical cut (75 minutes). There's a choice of commentaries by Weeks: one solo, the other with film writer Sam Unland. Novelist Stephen Laws provides an intro (six minutes) and there's an extract from a 1998 Q&A with Weeks (16 minutes), as well as a new interview with composer Carl Davis (18 minutes). Amicus diehards will appreciate a fascinating set of audio interviews with producer Milton Subotsky (180 minutes), recorded for an abortive book. Editor Peter Tanner covers the first half of his career in an audio interview (75 minutes). Plus: image gallery; trailers (one with commentary by Kim Newman and David Flint); a 36-page booklet. **Nick Setchfield**



976-EVIL

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1988 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Englund

▶ Cast Stephen Geoffreys, Patrick O'Bryan, Sandy Dennis, Robert Picardo

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Plastering the** words "Freddy Krueger" next to director Robert Englund's name on the box of this gleefully camp horror feels a bit unfair: *976-Evil* deserves to be judged on its own merits. The tragic tale of Hoax (Stephen Geoffreys), a bullied nerd who succumbs to the temptations of the dark side after calling a creepy "horroroscope" premium line, it's deeply silly, but has an irresistible energy. Englund throws everything he's got at the screen: it's all dry ice, neon, Satanic giggles, and broad, almost John Waters-esque performances.

Low budget by '80s standards, the visuals mostly stand up to the Blu-ray treatment, with the demonic make-up effects looking particularly impressive. Maybe it's not ground-breaking (and certainly no-one could accuse this of being elevated) but it's got more goofy charm than many of its contemporaries.

▶ **Extras** A decent set of interviews (make-up effects creator Kevin Yagher, producer Lisa M Hansen, and make-up supervisor Howard Berger – 47 minutes) plus an endearing commentary with Robert Englund and set decorator Nancy Booth Englund (yes, his wife), and a booklet. The most interesting extra is the extended VHS cut, presented in 4:3 in grainy low-res. If you saw the film as a kid, this'll push all your nostalgia buttons. **Sarah Dobbs**



"Am I going to need a coat or not?" "Best take it, eh."

HIS HOUSE

Refugee crisis

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Director Remi Weekes

▶ Cast Sopé Dirisù, Wunmi Mosaku, Matt Smith

NETFLIX Even in the best haunted house movies, you can't help but ask why our beleaguered heroes don't just get the hell out of there. But what if they're asylum seekers, and to cause any fuss would be to risk deportation?

This is just one of the many clever things about Remi Weekes's suspenseful and moving debut, in which married couple Bol and Rial (Sopé Dirisù and Wunmi Mosaku) wind up in England on an unwelcoming estate after fleeing war-torn Sudan. En route, they lost their young daughter to the perilous ocean crossing. Now, placed in a shabby, barely

habitable house by case worker Mark (Matt Smith), they find themselves assaulted by ghosts of the past.

Dealing with such weighty themes as grief, survivor guilt, assimilation, loneliness and a splintering marriage, *His House* makes for potent, affecting drama. The scares also linger, as scuttling noises in the rotting walls escalate into a barrage of in-camera effects that favour ideas over cheap jumps. At once claustrophobic and imaginatively cinematic – one terrific scene brings the ocean into Bol and Rial's living room, replete with dank apparitions that might have drifted in from *The Fog* – it marks Weekes as a talent to watch. Even if it's through your fingers.

Jamie Graham

i The production switched between a real house in Tilbury, Essex and a recreation on a soundstage – the split was 50/50.



VOODOO APOCALYPSE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 NOVEMBER**

2018 | 15 | Download

⚡ **Thought we'd left tedious** grindhouse homage back in the 2000s? Think again.

In an attempt to mash together poliziotteschi, kung fu and zombie movies, this Spanish horror-comedy pits useless detectives White Chocolate and Charlie Vargas against the guitar-toting demon Papa Voodoo. But it's so witless and uninspiring that the final result is more existentially depressing than entertaining. There's little more painful than unfunny comedy. **Sarah Dobbs**



7 HOURS ON EARTH

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | 13+ | VOD

⚡ **This film may only cover** seven hours, but they feel like 70. Aliens crash-land on a school in Tooting, where a bunch of teens – of varying acting ability – are experiencing relationship angst while putting on a production of *Romeo And Juliet*. Lead Rufiat Awolope shows promise but she's dragged down by everyone around her, while a faux *Stranger Things*-style score and hand-held cameras desperately try to add life. Sadly, there is no life on this Earth. **Jayne Nelson**



SPUTNIK

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | 15 | DVD/download

⚡ **"We sent two into orbit, yet** three returned to Earth," a grim-faced Russian official tells Oksana Akinshina's equally grim-faced neurophysiologist, in a line that neatly sums up this impressive Russian sci-fi horror. Part *Alien*, part *The Quatermass Experiment*, part *Chenobyl*, *Sputnik*'s Soviet-era setting and brutalist milieu give what might have been a fairly familiar SF horror a bracing visual twist. Modest use of CG and clean, simple storytelling make this an impressive debut for director Egor Abramenko.

⚡ **Extras** None. **Steve O'Brien**



TREMORS: SHRIEKER ISLAND

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 16 NOVEMBER**

2020 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

⚡ **Tremors was a classic, but** the law of diminishing returns means this sixth sequel shouldn't have a lot going for it. And yes, this tale of Graboids going wild after transportation to a private island by a rich game hunter is little more than ho-hum. However, it does boast lush Thai scenery, energetic flamethrower action and a gleeful performance from Michael Gross, returning as the irrepressible Burt Gummer.

⚡ **Extras** Three featurettes. **Jayne Nelson**

DAWN OF THE DEAD

Consumer frights



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED 16 NOVEMBER

1978 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

► Director George A Romero

► Cast Ken Foree, David Emge, Gaylen Ross, Scott H Reiniger

There's a certain irony in a film about the perils of rampant consumerism being celebrated with a deluxe box set, but fans of George A Romero's zombie classic are unlikely to mind.

This lavish new collection packages *Dawn's* three cuts (all with new 4K transfers) alongside a fourth disc of extras, and more. Most horror fans will have seen Romero's peerless theatrical cut.

Some time after the events of *Night Of The Living Dead*, society is breaking down. We follow Stephen (David Emge) and Francine (Gaylen Ross) as they join forces with two SWAT guys to seek sanctuary in an abandoned mall. But their new home quickly becomes a gilded cage...

The extended "Cannes" cut adds 10 minutes. The extra moments of character insight are welcome, but do add some bloat. Conversely, the Argento Cut loses seven minutes – and much of the film's celebrated satire. The results are a fascinating example of how the same material can be presented in a very different way.

Is this the greatest zombie movie ever made? *Night* is arguably scarier, but there's something about *Dawn* that gets under the skin. There's an existential emptiness at the heart of it that's more frightening than any ghoul.

► **Extras** Disc four is packed full of new material. "Zombies And Bikers" (58 minutes) delves into the making of the film, particularly its intense finale. "Memories Of Monroeville" (34 minutes) discusses the tricky process of shooting at a working mall. "Raising The Dead" (25 minutes) investigates the logistics of such a complex project. "The FX Of Dawn" (13 minutes) interviews effects maestro Tom Savini, while "Dummies! Dummies!" (12 minutes) catches up with actor Richard France. A previously unseen George Romero interview (20 minutes) is a lovely reminder of the much-missed director.

Document Of The Dead is essential, a fascinating glimpse into

“The Argento Cut loses seven minutes”

the film's birth, and features in both its original 1978 cut (66 minutes) and the 2012 extended edition (128 minutes). 2004's *The Dead Will Walk* (80 minutes) is also worth a watch. You also get four commentaries (one new), Super 8 footage shot by an extra, and trailers and TV/radio spots.

160-page hardback *Dissecting The Dead* includes 18 essays touching on subjects like class conflict, plus a Romero interview. You also get a copy of the novelisation. Perhaps most exciting for hardcore fans are the three CDs. As well as the complete Goblin soundtrack (52 minutes), there's two discs (141 minutes) of De Wolfe library music cues for you to lurch around your living room to. **Will Salmon**

The kids that attack Peter, a rare example of running Romero zombies, were played by Tom Savini's nephew and niece.



LAKE MICHIGAN MONSTER

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2020 | 15 | Blu-ray

► Director Ryland Brickson Cole

Tews

► Cast Ryland Brickson Cole Tews, Erick West, Beulah Peters, Daniel Long

No budget? No worries: just spoof a bad horror movie. The irony being, it's actually really difficult to make a good bad movie. And *Lake Michigan Monster*, for the most part, is a pretty terrible movie. Cult connoisseurs should stick with it though, because there are some unexpected treasures in its depths.

Shot in black and white, this rum tale of salty sea dogs, fish monsters and revenge is a one-note gag for too much of its running time, relying on a mixture of high-camp acting, deadpan reaction shots and cheesy puns, all delivered with breathtakingly little understanding of comic timing. But increasingly as the film goes on, there are moments of weird, John Waters-style humour, Monty Python surrealism or disturbingly bizarre visuals that evoke early David Lynch. Crucially, they're what remain in the memory.

► **Extras** No less than three commentaries: cast and crew; pissed cast and crew; and two very spirited film critics. There's also a video for the film's shanty "Dear Old Captain Seafield" (five minutes), three lovably shambolic festival/podcast interviews (46 minutes), every episode of the director's bonkers webseries *LIPS* (29 minutes) and a bunch of promos and trailers. **Dave Golder**



"Guys, has anyone got any Soluble Disprin?"

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But where's the sassy animal sidekick? Oh.

OVER THE MOON

Rocket Plan

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | U | SVOD

Also in cinemas

▶ Directors Glen Keane, John Kahrs

▶ Cast Phillipa Soo, Cathy Ang,

Ken Jeong, Sandra Oh

NETFLIX It seems almost all kids'

films these days follow the same theme: a youngster loses a parent – whether to death or divorce – and then a replacement arrives, much to the child's anguish. So here we go again in US/Chinese animated musical *Over The Moon*.

After losing her mum, Fei Fei (Cathy Ang) doesn't want dad to marry his new girlfriend, so to remind him that love should be eternal, she builds a rocket ship to the moon to prove that an actual love goddess lives there. Said goddess, however, voiced by *Hamilton*'s impressively-lunged

Phillipa Soo, isn't quite what she bargained for – and the moon itself is pretty darn bonkers as well, often resembling something that Doctor Strange might have brought into existence.

Family break-ups notwithstanding, this is a lovely film that will warm every ventricle of a chilly heart. Fei Fei is adorable (though not as adorable as her pet bunny), the songs are heartfelt and Ken Jeong adds comedic heft as a weirdo moon-beast.

At times it's a little too reminiscent of *Inside Out* or other Pixar fodder to feel truly original, but the Chinese setting provides just enough freshness to overcome the similarities. The end result is an ambitious moonshot that doubles as a warm hug. **Jayne Nelson**

i China's first lunar probe – Chang'e 1 – was named in honour of the goddess. Chang'e 2, 3 and 4 have since followed.



32 MALASANA STREET

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | SVOD

SHUDDER Impatient for the next *Conjuring* film? You may find this Spanish chiller an acceptable stopgap. Set in 1976 Madrid, it sees a family move into a haunted apartment, and has a very similar MO. By arguably casting both disability and transgenderism as monstrous, it'll offend some, but the more fundamental problem is the familiarity of the scares. Self-rocking chair, flickering light, swiftly passing something... expect a full house on your bingo card. **Ian Berriman**



BLOOD HARVEST

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 16 NOVEMBER**

2020 | 15 | DVD/download

⚡ **This handsomely shot folk** horror fuses the isolated setting of *The Village* with *The Witch*'s paranoid hysteria.

It's 1973, and in a devoutly religious community, rumours abound that Agatha and her daughter Audrey are witches – rumours that turn out to be entirely correct. It's a well made, atmospheric film, but it's a shame that the contrast between the village's 1800s aesthetic and attitudes and the '70s setting is never explored, and that it fails to match the chills of its forebears.

⚡ **Extras** None. **Will Salmon**



EVERY TIME I DIE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2020 | 15 | Download

⚡ **It's best you know about** this film's USP going in, as its first 40 minutes may well stretch your patience to breaking point. If you can make it through that dreary first act, to when Sam (Drew Fonteiro) is killed by the boyfriend of his latest squeeze, then wakes up in the body of mutual friend Jay (Marc Menchaca), it's worth the wait. Beautifully shot and snazzily edited, albeit clumsily structured, this thoughtful SF thriller suggests great things ahead for co-writer/director Robi Michael.

Steve O'Brien



LIFE AFTER THE NAVIGATOR

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 NOVEMBER**

2020 | 15 | Blu-ray

⚡ **From the team behind** 2017's equally candid *Life After Flash*, this doc mixes a retrospective on the making of *Flight Of The Navigator* with an account of star Joey Cramer's trajectory through stardom, self-hatred, drug abuse, crime, incarceration and redemption. It's a raw, often wrenching story, told with empathy as it reclaims one of the true lost boys of '80s cinema.

⚡ **Extras** Deleted scenes; short film; director/Joey interviews and more. **Nick Setchfield**



TALES FROM THE HOOD I & II

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1995/2018 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Rusty Cundieff

▶ Cast Clarence Williams III, Keith David, Wings Hauser, Rosalind Cash

BLU-RAY DEBUT These creepy horror anthologies put a black social commentary twist on the format. In the 1995 film, three gangbangers turn up at a house to pick up some drugs – or “the shit!” as the owner, Mr Simms (Clarence Williams III) gleefully says. He relates four tales of supernatural vengeance, voodoo dolls and more.

The themes – institutional racism, domestic violence, the normalisation of the KKK – are all clear and depressingly still relevant, but director Rusty Cundieff approaches the material with a wry sense of humour. This is schlocky fun with a serious intent.

The belated 2018 sequel is more of the same, albeit less effective. The format is identical, with Keith David now taking on the role of demonic storyteller. Final vignette “The Sacrifice” touches on the real-life lynching of Emmett Till, and packs a punch. The other three tales are weaker, however – particularly the goofy opener “Good Golly”, which sees a white woman have sex with a giant living goliwog.

✦ **Extras** The first film gets a commentary from Rusty Cundieff. “Welcome To Hell” is an engaging Making Of (56 minutes) with cast and crew. There’s also a new interview with Cundieff (69 minutes) and one with writer/producer Darin Scott (19 minutes). Plus: trailer; gallery; booklet. **Will Salmon**



Twilight Zone nerds will spot the reference.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE Season One

A lack of good Serling points

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2019 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Developed by Simon Kinberg, Jordan Peele, Marco Ramirez

✦ **The omens were good.** This fourth incarnation of the spooky, satirical anthology series boasts *Get Out/Us* director Jordan Peele as its new narrator and guiding creative force. There’s also a new social landscape of Trump bluster, social media excess and fake news for inspiration. But the twist in this tale is that it’s the worst version of the show so far.

While the premiere, “The Comedian”, is a decent enough parable about the lengths a stand-up will go to for laughs, the show soon descends into clunky and embarrassingly unsubtle allegories about police racism, immigration, reality-star politicians and other Twitter-fuelling issues.

Honestly, it makes *Doctor Who* season 12 look like *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Even when plots start promisingly they invariably

suffer from duff, nonsensical or cheesy endings, and often the main characters are too dull for you to care about their fates.

The finale is a meta affair about a *Twilight Zone* writer’s internal struggle over the show’s balance of entertainment versus social responsibility. Some self-mocking gags about the quality of writing land a little too close for comfort, making you wonder if the entire series has been some kind of elaborate joke...

✦ **Extras** There are two in-depth documentaries: “Crossing Over: Living In The Twilight Zone” (67 minutes), about the making of the new series, and “Remembering Rod Serling” (37 minutes). Plus: three audio commentaries; black and white versions of all 10 episodes; deleted scenes (nine minutes), brief intros (one to three minutes each), a gag reel (three minutes); the full campaign video from the “whiny kid becomes President” episode. **Dave Golder**

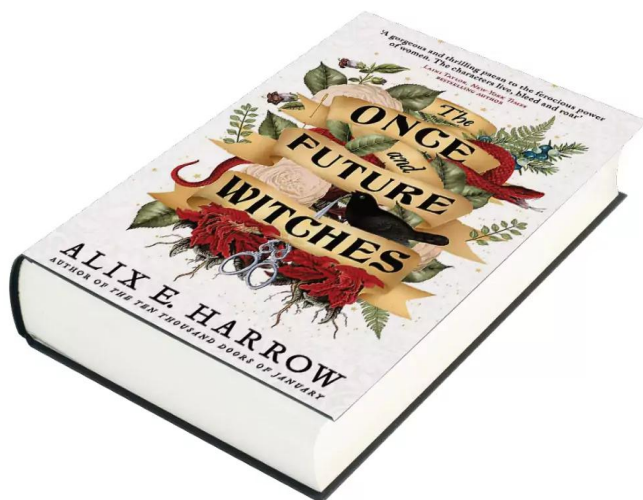
i The 2016 US election convinced Peele to attempt this reboot, as Trump’s triumph felt like living in *The Twilight Zone*.

(ROUND UP)



Though billed as a folk horror, **THE OTHER LAMB** (out now, DVD/streaming on MUBI) doesn’t much feel like one. There are shades of *The Handmaid’s Tale* to this drama about a small cult led by a messianic figure whose dreamboat looks conceal an abusive nature, and whose rules (“Only the Shepherd can tell stories”) work as an analogy for oppressive patriarchal religious structures in general. It’s attractively composed, and Raffey Cassidy simmers nicely as the young worm who eventually turns. Part historical film, part fantasy, part horror, German silent movie **WAXWORKS** (Blu-ray, 9 November)

uses the framework of a writer hired by the owner of a carnival waxworks to write stories to publicise the exhibits. A two-minute sequence where he dreams of Jack the Ripper/Spring-heeled Jack is the “horror” highlight. Its expressionist techniques and memorably stylised sets are the chief draw; director Paul Leni later went to Hollywood to make movies like *The Cat And The Canary*. A Vietnam vet (John Phillip Law) and his new bride (Brit Eklund) spend their honeymoon on a yacht with two war buddies and their partners in 1987 slasher **MOON IN SCORPIO** (Blu-ray, out now). They eventually find themselves adrift, picked off one by one by a killer with a spiked glove. Apparently this was intended as a supernatural horror before the producers recut it, which would explain why it’s such a baffling mess. Finally, there are new 4K Blu-ray releases out now for both *District 9* and *V For Vendetta*.



THE ONCE AND FUTURE WITCHES

Suffragette City

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

528 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Alix E Harrow

► Publisher Orbit

☛ Having seen her debut *The Ten Thousand Doors of January* nominated for virtually every genre award going, Alix E Harrow could be forgiven for resting on her laurels for a while. Instead, a year later, she's back with a 500-page victory lap of a follow-up that is richer, stranger and angrier than *January*, if not quite so smoothly polished.

When 17-year-old wild child Juniper Eastwood washes up 200 miles from home in the city of New Salem, Massachusetts, she finds that the Wanted posters accusing her of witchcraft and murder have beaten her there. Her sisters Bella and Agnes are in town

too, but that's not much comfort, given that the three of them have been estranged for years. The city itself, meanwhile, is divided along all the social lines you'd expect of the US in 1893: there are suffragists campaigning for (white) women's rights, workers organising for better conditions, opponents of both denouncing them as threats to the social order, and African-Americans resisting the violent rescinding of rights earned during the Reconstruction era. As the story unfolds, Harrow gives us a wonderfully panoramic sense of how the different parts of city life fit together – or don't.

This is, however, an alternate history, whose major departure from "our" 1893 is that witchcraft is real. Outlawed for centuries, it remains a half-hidden part of daily life, passed down through families in the form of charms and tricks

to, say, make wash day go quicker. Magic is "the distance between what you have and what you need", and in this time of ferment its use spreads because it gives the downtrodden a way to fight back – one of several clever blends of plot and worldbuilding. One character, for example, is a labour activist, whose spells make factory machinery rust and crumble during strikes.

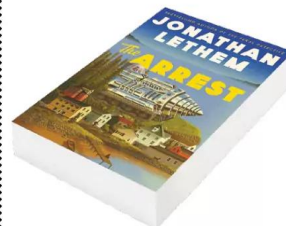
For Juniper, who stumbles across a Women's Association rally on her first night in New Salem and is instantly smitten, the way to achieve the suffragists' goals is obvious: magic. Her new comrades are understandably wary; it's New Salem because the old one was burned to the ground by a witchfinder. But Juniper isn't about to let a little thing like mortal danger – or sinister anti-witch mayoral candidate Gideon Hill – stop her.

“Witchcraft remains a hidden part of daily life”

The Once And Future Witches showcases all the qualities of Harrow's writing that made her debut such a joy to read: convincing characterisation, beautiful turns of phrase, and a world evoked through rich detail without drowning the reader in an info-dump. The central trio of sisters share narrative point-of-view duties, and each is enjoyably complex in her own way. The hurt of their entangled histories forms the emotional core of the novel and drives much of its plot. All of this means that setbacks and disagreements feel organic, and the characters around them help bring New Salem to life through the variety of their backgrounds and experiences.

It's not perfect, but it's never less than absorbing, and often moving. This is a big novel with a big heart. **Nic Clarke**

i Salem's witches were hanged, not burned. Ditto for witches in England; burning was reserved for heretics.



THE ARREST

★★★★★

► RELEASED 12 NOVEMBER

320 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Jonathan Lethem

► Publisher Atlantic Books

☛ A lot of us wonder what use we'd be in a post-apocalypse scenario, and in *The Arrest* Jonathan Lethem appears to address his own such concerns directly by making his protagonist a writer. The main character refers to himself as Journeyman, and is a screenwriter who worked almost entirely as a script doctor – a skill no longer in great demand.

Lethem has drifted in and out of SF since his 1995 debut *Gun, With Occasional Music*, and his work interacts with the genre in a low-key way. *The Arrest* is vague about exactly what the catastrophe of the title involved, but it was evidently unspectacular – electronic devices and cars have simply stopped working. Journeyman now lives in his sister's hometown on the East Coast, delivering meat for the butcher. One day his old colleague, high-flying movie exec Todbaum, arrives in a nuclear-powered supercar, dangerously disrupting life in the settlement.

In a sense this is Lethem's most full-on SF novel, yet it's also light on SF elements: it uses the collapse of civilisation to examine human relationships. Journeyman somehow can't escape being defined by Todbaum: even as he lives through the apocalypse, he still doesn't feel like the protagonist of his own story. The result is a pleasingly idiosyncratic take on things falling apart. **Eddie Robson**



THE KEY TO FEAR

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 NOVEMBER**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Kristin Cast

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

❖ **“No touching today for a healthy tomorrow”.** As well as being a catchy potential Covid-19 safety slogan, that’s the motto of *The Key*. In Kristen Cast’s dystopian franchise opener, they’re the omnipresent government agency responsible for keeping a deadly virus at bay. Some years before, “Cerberus” decimated the population, so now physical distancing is the law. To keep the species going, babies are grown in labs, while abstinent couples are assigned to one another via algorithm. But a safe world turns out to be a boring world, so when innocent nurse Elodie meets sexy rebel Aiden, well, you can guess what happens to her sterile, passionless life.

Narrated by three teenagers, this is a very young-seeming YA novel. Adult perspectives are completely absent, and older readers will cringe at its more juvenile moments – not just because the characters are so naïve, but because the prose is oddly immature.

The worldbuilding, too, feels underdeveloped. In the future, teenagers can run corporations, but sexism is rampant; everyone’s got a hyper-realistic VR console at home, but guns are still the most effective way to kill someone, and self-driving cars are still thrilling.

Still, given some people’s refusal to follow rules, we probably don’t need to worry about this particular fiction becoming reality. **Sarah Dobbs**



DOCTOR WHO: THE KNIGHT, THE FOOL AND THE DEAD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW**

192 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Steve Cole

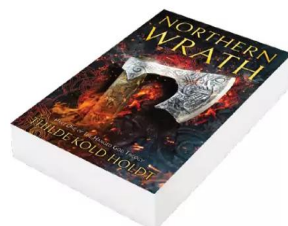
► Publisher BBC Books

❖ **Previously, the various** strands of the multimedia *Time Lord Victorious* initiative only skirted around the edges of what the arc is actually about. This novel finally lays the cards on the table.

The Tenth Doctor arrives in the Dark Times (the prehistory of the universe, before the Time Lords took control), where he encounters the Kotturuh – a god-like race that determine the lifespans of other species. Allied once more with Brian the Ood, the Doctor tries to rescue a young girl from the Kotturuh.

The scope of Steve Cole’s novel is vast despite its slim page count. The strangeness of the Dark Times, an all-powerful enemy and a Doctor pushed to his wits’ end... there’s a lot to explore. But Cole is more content simply wheel-spinning, with most of the book spent running around, until a combination of hubris and Brian whispering in his ear finally convinces the Doctor to take a rash course of action.

The megalomania here goes far beyond the character’s power trip in “The Waters Of Mars”. This *should* be an interesting development; instead, it just makes the Doctor seem arrogant, selfish and stupid. It’s vital to the arc, and there’s a genuinely exciting cliffhanger, but the liberties taken with the character never feel fully earned. **Will Salmon**



NORTHERN WRATH

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

700 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Thilde Kold Holdt

► Publisher Rebellion

❖ **This is, in many ways, a** classic genre fantasy. There are several characters, mostly very young, several with touches of non-human ancestry, whose points of view you dart between. There’s an immediate, worldly threat – southerners attacking the village of Ash-hill, followed by the villagers and their allies’ revenge mission – plus a greater supernatural threat building elsewhere.

Where *Northern Wrath* differs from classic genre fantasy is in its solid grounding in real-world history and myth. Ash-hill is a Jute village in what is now Denmark; runes have power and our world is just one of nine, now all at risk.

Often in novels with this sort of setting the characters feel anachronistic, like modern people stuffed into fancy dress and dropped into a world they’re not really part of. Thilde Kold Holdt doesn’t make that mistake, however, and her characters’ attitudes and beliefs match those of the people around them.

Yet on the whole they don’t feel particularly deep. It’s true that in an action-based story there’s never masses of room for reflection, yet the most intriguing character, Finn, is the one whose eyes we see through least – and despite taking up the bulk of the narrative, young leads Einer and Hilda are interesting for what they do, not who they are. You’ll keep reading for the action, not the heroes.

Miriam McDonald



PARIS BY STARLIGHT

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 5 NOVEMBER**

480 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author Robert Dinsdale

► Publisher Del Rey

❖ **Stories of refugees, of the** struggle to find a new home and gain acceptance are, sadly, timeless, but seem more than a little topical right now. The myth of the outsider as threat also seems to be perennial.

Paris By Starlight is the tale of the People, with no name or named country, who’ve been driven from their home by the landlocked sea by soldiers and travelled through Europe, via detention camps and border guards and traffickers, to find themselves in Paris. The People are nocturnal, and as they make the city their home the night fills with their colourful – and magical – flora and fauna. At first the Parisians fall in love with the beauty the People have brought, but too quickly many are muttering about outsiders and new mythologies threatening their way of life.

Stories of acceptance, community and migration are sensitively told, although with their lack of a homeland and symbol of a seven-pointed star, the People are perhaps too closely analogous to early 20th century Jews – something which makes the novel’s lack of a satisfactory conclusion a little uncomfortable. In its tales of love and family and their practicalities and compromises, this is a skilful, human tale, as well as its study of community, fearmongering and nationalism. Only on the larger scale does it fall short. **Rhian Drinkwater**



THE NOLAN VARIATIONS



★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook

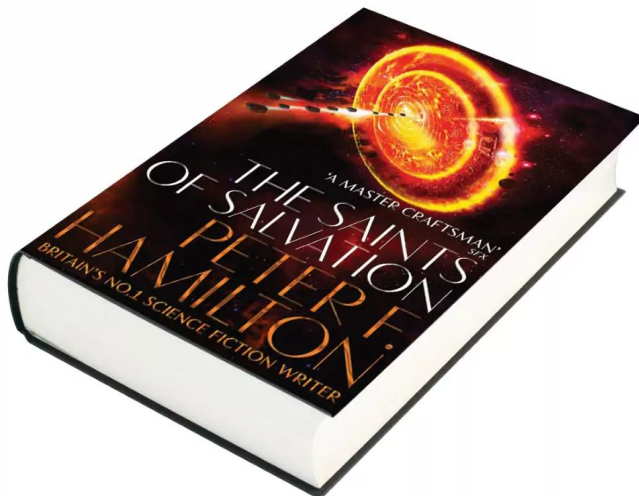
► Author **Tom Shone**

► Publisher **Faber & Faber**

☞ From the labyrinthine logo of his production company Syncopy to the synapse-frying plot machinations of his latest, *Tenet*, Christopher Nolan remains one of our most elusive mainstream filmmakers – half Hitchcock, half Rubik's Cube.

This smart, insightful book attempts to pierce that oh-so-cryptic carapace, tease out the man and the mind behind the cool blue IMAX glaze and time-haunted storytelling of his movies. It's not a biography – Nolan blanched at the idea – and it's striking that while we see pictures of the films that influenced him, and even the inspirationally regimented spaces of his old boarding school, there are no images of Nolan before he emerged as a public figure.

Keeping to a film by film chronology, the book reaches for intellectual back-up (Kipling, Borges and Kant are referenced in the opening pages alone) but is an unfailingly engaging read, uncovering personal touchstones through a year-long series of interviews with Nolan himself. Tom Shone is a good provocateur – Nolan, we're told, is "the greatest living filmmaker of the Victorian era" – even if he throws the softest of punches at his subject, addressing sound mix issues and plot problems without pushing the points as much as some might like. There are revelations, digressions and, fittingly, diagrams. **Nick Setchfield**



THE SAINTS OF SALVATION

Time to fight back

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

528 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Peter F. Hamilton**

► Publisher **Macmillan**

☞ One of the recurring ideas in Peter F. Hamilton's novels is that if and when humanity begins to travel into the stars, it'll be dangerous out there. Well, he *does* write space operas. More specifically, Hamilton is fascinated with the idea that we'll inevitably encounter species that have agendas far different to our own.

In the case of the *Salvation* trilogy, here reaching its conclusion in a hard SF novel that builds to a dazzlingly realised, thumpingly exciting more-is-more space battle, that means humanity in the 23rd century encountering the Olyix. Initially friendly, they're actually technologically super-advanced zealots obsessed with the idea of taking entire races to meet their species' god at the end of time. This involves cocooning and harvesting humanity to be reawakened in the future.

In pincer plotting even Christopher Nolan might consider

ambitious, the action moves across different timelines. On Earth in the 23rd century, a planet enduring terrifying attacks (dubbed Blitz2 in London) and where people shelter in city-bubbles, we watch as humanity pursues an audacious plan that offers the hope of one day, in the distant future, defeating the Olyix.

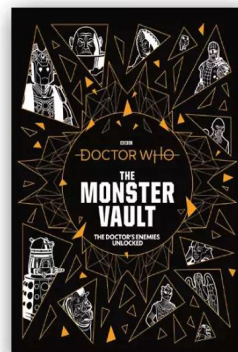
But in that future things are looking bleak as the Olyix's technology continues to evolve, and those humans who remain free are harried and hunted across the stars. Until, that is, with some authorial hand-waving that's forgivable considering the way it helps to ratchet up the tension, humanity sets off on a new path.

Throw in a panoply of characters and Hamilton's seeming interest in such questions as what a post-scarcity society might look like, and there's lots going on. Yet he never loses control of his narrative(s); nobody else does this kind of action-packed space opera with such elan. **Jonathan Wright**

i Peter F. Hamilton has been co-writing a new novella with Gareth L. Powell, *Light Chaser*. It's due for publication in March.

BULLET TIME

A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



DOCTOR WHO: THE MONSTER VAULT

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

311 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Authors **Jonathan Morris,**

Penny CS Andrews

► Publisher **BBC Books**

- This coffee-table book anatomises 128 aliens and robots.
- About half debuted in the classic series – so young 'uns may have the pleasure of being introduced to Alpha Centauri, the Tetraps and the Nucleus of the Swarm.
- Lee Johnson's illustrations tart up stills, like our "The Best Of Both Worlds" cover did (issue 331). The results are slick – though even he can't make the Mara look good...
- The write-ups, which can be a bit dry, include facts we didn't glean from TV: did you know the Nimon are cyborgs?
- A 10-page "Making Monsters" section features behind-the-scenes photos and concept art.
- Highlight: tongue-in-cheek "Unanswered Question" boxes, which creatively address topics like how living stones the Ogri move, and why a Vervoid has a Scouse accent!





THE SNOW SONG

★★★★★

► RELEASED 12 NOVEMBER

285 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Sally Gardner

► Publisher HQ

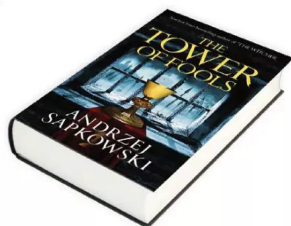
❖ **Once upon a time, there** was a teller of fairy tales... Many writers have created updated versions of classic stories, but few can create entirely new books with the disarming directness and mythical truth of those original tales. Sally Gardner happens to be one such talented author.

Set in a remote village, cut off from the world and ruled by superstition enforced by the male elders, *The Snow Song* is the story of Edith, a young woman who falls in love with an outsider. As winter approaches and her lover fails to return, dooming her to marriage with the most powerful – and hateful – man in the village, Edith loses the power of speech.

Packed with characters who feel both distinctive and universal, this is a beautiful, haunting book showing how tradition can be used to imprison women, and what can be achieved when they begin to hear each other's stories. While few of us may live in such strict conditions, many will be able to relate to the feeling of being confined by other people's expectations, and be inspired by the glimmers of hope that one day, change is possible.

The interrelations of the villagers' lives and the slow unfolding of their personal tragedies and loves is skillfully done, combining to create an atmospheric tale that will stay with you long after the pages are closed.

Rhian Drinkwater



THE TOWER OF FOOLS

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

526 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Andrzej Sapkowski

► Publisher Gollancz

❖ **Andrzej Sapkowski, creator** of *The Witcher*, launches a new series here, set against the backdrop of the clash between the Catholic church and the reformist Hussites in 15th century Bohemia. His protagonist is Reynevan, a young scholar on the run after he's caught bedding someone else's wife. Attempting to evade his paramour's vengeful in-laws, Reynevan encounters everything from witches to robber knights and the Inquisition, in whose hands he winds up in an asylum, the titular Tower Of Fools.

Sapkowski's overwritten prose is hard going. He describes everyone with considerable detail, making it impossible to know which characters are worth remembering. The dialogue is burdened with turgid theological debates and untranslated Latin. He's clearly done considerable research into the period, but descriptions of coats of arms hamstring the pacing in the battle scenes. Reynevan is too passive a hero, bounced from one crisis to the next, and the murder of his brother seems to languish far down his list of priorities.

The most engaging sequence involves a Solstice festival attended by supernatural creatures, but the magical ingredients sit at odds with the history. This hardly whets the appetite for part two. **David West**



THE BOOK OF MALACHI

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

304 pages | Paperback/ebook/audiobook

► Author TC Farren

► Publisher Titan Books

❖ **Acclaimed South African** novelist Tracey Farren has hopped genres with *The Book Of Malachi*, her first work of SF. It takes place on a distant, disused oil rig, home to a shady organ-farming programme, where extra organs are being grown inside the bodies of convicted murderers for the benefit of the wealthy. The staff are joined by Malachi Dakwa; his payment for six months' service will be a new tongue, to replace the one cut out by militants in a civil war.

Farren has created an extraordinary narrator in Malachi, who is alienated from the world partly by his disability but mostly by his trauma and feelings of guilt: he was the only survivor of a school massacre. As events unfold he feels the urge to talk about his terrible experiences – not to his colleagues, but to the prisoners, who have all done worse things than he has...

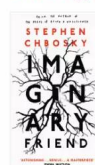
This is a claustrophobic novel, set in a very-near-future world that's hinted at but barely seen, and any misgivings about the plausibility of the operation are swept aside by Farren's vivid prose. While external events do have an impact on the narrative, its development is all about Malachi's changing feelings towards his job, the prisoners, and his past.

It's an uncomfortable read, but intense and memorable.

Eddie Robson

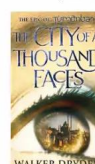
REISSUES

The big-name paperback this month is **IMAGINARY FRIEND** (★★★★, 26 November, Orion), the new book (his first in 20 years!) by Stephen Chbosky, author of *The*



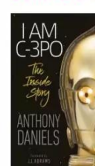
Perks Of Being A Wallflower. A horror novel, it follows an abused mother starting over

in a new town with her young son. After going missing in the woods, he reemerges six days later, now accompanied by a voice only he can hear... We said: "There's rather too much going on at times... More positively, comparisons with Stephen King don't seem fanciful in terms of Chbosky's gifts for dialogue and differentiating a big cast of characters." "Walker Dryden", author of **CITY OF A THOUSAND FACES** (★★★★, 26 November, Orion) is actually two



people: Mike Walker and John Scott Dryden, who previously brought the city of Tumanbay

(capital of an empire built on the slave trade) to life in a Radio 4 drama. This literary version centres on two brothers – head of the Palace Guard and Commander of the army – as they face a rebellion led by a mysterious woman. We said: "An engaging cast and a multi-layered plot command the attention – though there's some sense of being constrained by what works for radio." Finally, Anthony Daniels relates the view from behind the shiny gold



faceplate in memoir **I AM C-3PO** (★★★★, 5 November, DK). We said: "Daniels's writing is witty and to the point. Hardcore fans might not learn anything new, but it's extremely enjoyable."

FLASH GORDON: THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE FILM

Making Mongo

★★★★★

► RELEASED 20 NOVEMBER

192 pages | Hardback

► Author John Walsh

► Publisher Titan Books

✶ There was always a lot more to 1980's *Flash Gordon* than Brian Blessed's ubiquitous catchphrase, and this comprehensive Making Of dives into a behind-the-scenes story every bit as unconventional as the movie itself.

Director Mike Hodges admits he's still baffled about movie mogul Dino De Laurentiis's decision to hire him. This was

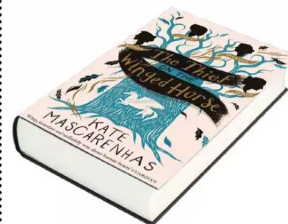
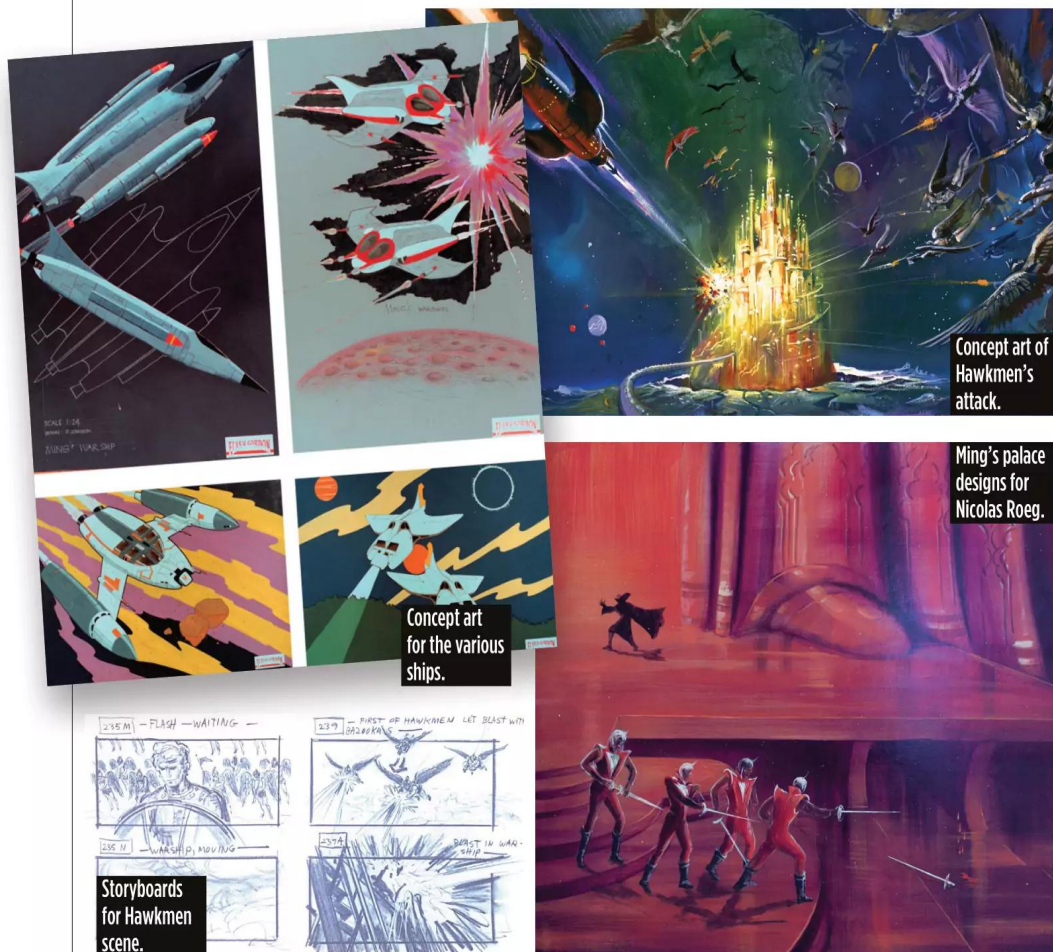
a production where British and Italian crew members couldn't always understand each other, but their unusual alchemy conjured up a cult classic.

John Walsh – author of *Harryhausen: The Lost Movies* – has assembled an impressive number of interviewees – from stars to bit-part players – and trawled the archives for quotes from those who've passed away. There are entertaining anecdotes aplenty, and while some veer into déjà vu territory – Blessed tends to go into autopilot when reminiscing about Flash – even

the most hardcore fan will learn something new. In fact, with everything compartmentalised into very short chapters, you can't help feeling that loads of great material didn't make the cut.

It's in the visuals, however, that this book really proves its worth. From original '30s Alex Raymond comic strips to on-set photos and concept art from Nicolas Roeg's abandoned version of the movie, it's as much of a feast for the eyes as a Mongo sky. **Richard Edwards**

i Hodges often communicated with designer Danilo Donati by "pointing" and "drawing crude little pictures".



THE THIEF ON THE WINGED HORSE

★★★★★

► RELEASED 12 NOVEMBER

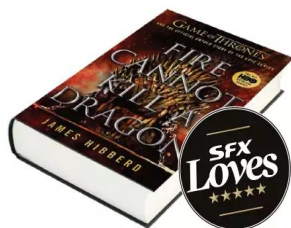
400 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Kate Mascarenhas

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

✶ Good ideas don't, unfortunately, automatically make good books. Kate Mascarenhas's follow-up to *The Psychology Of Time Travel* is great in prospect. For two centuries, the Kendrick family has lived and worked on its own private river island in Oxford. Trammelled by tradition and riven with rivalries, the Kendricks make magical dolls for high-end collectors, guarding trade secrets jealously from most of their own members. Enter a charismatic outsider, claiming to be a long-lost relative and soon romancing a disaffected daughter of the business; exit a valuable heirloom doll at the hands of a thief who may be the titular fairy.

If you're thinking this sounds like *Gormenghast* in a doll workshop: yes it does, but (sadly) no, it isn't. Instead, it's a disappointingly thin stew of undercooked storylines. The characters – with the exception of rebellious, conflicted Persephone – are more puppets than people, prone to inexplicable choices for the sake of the plot, with inner lives sketched largely via authorial infodump. Threads get left dangling to the extent that you'll be flicking back through the book, convinced you've missed a chapter. Persephone's feminist quest to upset the apple cart keeps the pages turning, but the rest is less than the sum of its parts. **Nic Clarke**



FIRE CANNOT KILL A DRAGON

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

452 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author James Hibberd

► Publisher Bantam Press

❖ **Disillusioned at seeing his** TV scripts watered down by constraints on budget, violence and language, George RR Martin set out to make his *A Song Of Ice And Fire* novels unfilmable. HBO eventually decided otherwise, of course, but the quest to bring the epic fantasy to the small screen was nearly as eventful as the Battle for the Seven Kingdoms.

Entertainment Weekly journalist James Hibberd covered *Game Of Thrones* from its inception all the way through to its final San Diego Comic-Con panel. That put him in the ideal position to assemble this extensive oral history, featuring over 50 new interviews with cast and crew.

The book covers as much ground as an army of White Walkers, tackling everything from casting to becoming the biggest show on the planet, via the disastrous unaired pilot: Lena Headey recalls looking “like a medieval Dolly Parton” as Cersei Lannister.

Importantly, Hibberd’s impressive access doesn’t come at the price of objectivity. *Fire Cannot Kill A Dragon* doesn’t gloss over *Game Of Thrones*’ many controversies, offering up plenty of comment on its treatment of female characters and the infamously divisive ending. An entertaining, comprehensive account of one of the 21st century’s most important TV shows.

Richard Edwards



THE RUSH'S EDGE

★★★★☆

► RELEASED 10 NOVEMBER

358 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Ginger Smith

► Publisher Angry Robot

❖ **This space opera debut is** an easy read, one where the briskness of the prose helps to offset the familiarity of the story being told.

The protagonists are genetically-modified super-soldier Hal, who has a hair-trigger temper and PTSD; little lost girl Vivi, who’s attracted to violent men (see where that’s going?); and retired officer/ship’s captain Tyce, who is firm but kind. There’s a fourth crew member, ship’s doctor Bryce, but as an older, sexually undesirable woman she’s strictly there to stitch the others back together after their latest scrap, and has no agency or character arc to speak of.

The plot includes alien AI, a looming interplanetary war, and the nascent struggle for rights for the GM soldiers. The action scenes have energy and impact, while the romance between Hal and Vivi reads like a Mills & Boon bodice-ripper – she does all the overwhelming feelings, and he does the unbridled ravishing.

What the story lacks is any surprises; every plot development is obvious well in advance, the cast never stray outside the parameters of their archetypes, and there’s a lack of conflict between the leads, who are uniformly supportive and nice to one another.

The adventure zips lightly along, but *The Rush’s Edge* is not a particularly substantial meal to digest.

David West



OPENING THE BOX OF DELIGHTS

★★★★☆

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

128 pages | Hardback

► Author Philip W Errington

► Publisher Darton, Longman & Todd

❖ **For those who religiously** watch the BBC’s 1984 adaptation of John Masefield’s *The Box Of Delights* every Christmas, a behind-the-scenes book is long overdue. This isn’t quite that, but instead a magical dive into the past, celebrating all aspects of Masefield’s 1935 novel. It whizzes through Masefield’s early life and career – going swiftly because after all we’re here, Abner-like, for *The Box* – before arriving at the Kay Harker books.

It’s subtitled as “A stunning visual celebration of John Masefield’s Christmas classic”, and each spread includes illustrations and other images. These brief snippets of press releases, albums or original publications are a joy. The sight of something like the opening page of the handwritten manuscript is a gloriously geeky delight; there’s also a previously unpublished abandoned element of the novel. But this is not just the story of the original author – it’s also that of the editors, the adapters, the illustrators, and even the history of the posset.

The author’s love and admiration for Masefield and his work – he briefly touches on his adolescent journey to find long-out-of-print books – is very much apparent. Hopefully he’ll follow up with an equally in-depth look at the television adaptation in a Christmas

future. Darren Scott

ALSO OUT

Charles Stross’s tenth *Laundry Files* book looks to be a good jumping-on point, since it features a new cast of characters.

DEAD LIES DREAMING (out now, Orbit) riffs on Peter Pan, as the Lost Boys, a gang of superpowered transhumans, are hired to steal the Necronomicon – a job which leads them back in time to Whitechapel, 1888...

12"x10" hardback **X-MEN: THE ART AND MAKING OF THE ANIMATED SERIES** (out now,

Abrams) interviews the creatives behind the much-admired ‘90s toon, and includes rare original art, animated cels and merchandising ephemera. Writers Eric and Julia Lewald know their onions – they worked on the series themselves. It’s a busy month for *Doctor Who* books, with three new collections out.

Dave Rudden’s **THE WINTERTIME PARADOX**

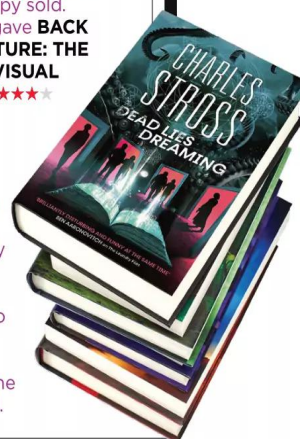
(out now, Puffin) includes a dozen festive-themed stories suitable for kids around 9-12. The five short stories and novella comprising **I AM THE MASTER** (5 November, BBC Books) span six incarnations of the renegade Time Lord.

ADVENTURES IN LOCKDOWN

(4 November) features adventures by *Who*’s Three Who Rule (Russell T Davies, Steven Moffat and Chris Chibnall), as well as the likes of Neil Gaiman, and Vinay Patel. £2.25 goes to Children In Need for every copy sold.

Finally, we gave **BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY** ★★★★★

on its 2015 release. Featuring removable items, like a lenticular McFly family photo, it’s now been expanded to cover the recent comics, game and musical.



X OF SWORDS

Blades Of Fury



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel**

► Writers/artists **Various**

ISSUES 1-8 If there's one thing that the new Jonathan Hickman-led era of the *X-Men* has in abundance, it's ambition. Ever since 2019's jaw-dropping *House Of X*, the breadth and scale of Hickman's epic relaunch has expanded in multiple directions with multiple writers, so it's no surprise that the first big event to bring together the various X-related titles is massive in pretty much every way.

Unlike most event comics, *X Of Swords* isn't built around a core miniseries – there are three jumbo-sized issues that mark the start, middle and end of the story, but otherwise, this is a 22-chapter

saga that stretches across nine separate ongoing comics: *Cable*, *Excalibur*, *Hellions*, *Marauders*, *New Mutants*, *Wolverine*, *X-Factor*, *X-Force* and *X-Men*.

The catalyst for the action is Arakko, a missing fragment of the living island Krakoa where the new mutant society has made its home. Stranded in another dimension for thousands of years, Arakko is now populated by an army of demonic creatures led by the erstwhile children of villain-turned-ally Apocalypse, and the only thing preventing them from invading and destroying Earth is the mysterious and mercurial Otherworld sorceress Saturnyne.

For the X-Men to defeat this threat, they have to find 10 mythic blades – the titular X of Swords – so they can fight in Saturnyne's

contest of champions and maybe save their planet. With the stakes high, the first chunk of this sprawling crossover focuses on obtaining the swords and assembling the champions who will wield them, in adventures that vary from attention-grabbing to overly episodic.

At the time of writing we're eight issues in, and when *X Of Swords* works, it's thrilling stuff: the initial 64-page *Creation* special that kicks off the story sees Hickman and *House Of X* artist Pepe Larraz reunite with spectacular results, and some of the various story threads go in intriguing directions, especially the new X-Factor team having to

“X Of Swords has moments of genuine brilliance”

deal with a sudden problem when the “resurrection protocols” for bringing dead mutants back to life abruptly go haywire.

However, it's hard to ignore the fact that Hickman is undoubtedly the best writer on the current X-titles, meaning that many of the crossover instalments from other writers feel less focussed and important (a prime offender being Wolverine's bizarre trip to Hell in chapters three and four).

X Of Swords has moments of genuine brilliance, but isn't consistent enough to combat the bloat and excess that affects most superhero crossovers, leaving this as a fun but overlong saga that still needs to justify its massive size and asking price. **Saxon Bullock**

i Launching out of *X Of Swords* is another X-title: a relaunch of the space-centric *SWOARD*, written by Al Ewing.



STRANGE ACADEMY



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel**

► Writer **Skottie Young**

► Artist **Humberto Ramos**

ISSUES 1-3 “Superpowered high-school drama” is a subgenre that both Marvel and DC revisit on a semi-regular basis, so it's no surprise that another example has turned up in the shape of the latest Marvel ongoing series.

The story centres around the first pupils to arrive at a New Orleans-based school for sorcerers set up by Doctor Strange. The trainee magic users come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and are soon experiencing the trials of teenage life, alongside the added dangers of reality-altering threats and the secrets that lurk behind the school's friendly façade.

There's no shortage of colourful incidents and bizarre action in Skottie Young's scripts, which pack plenty of invention into these first three issues, while regular Marvel artist Humberto Ramos does an impressive job of capturing the right tone of oddball weirdness.

It's good to see a mainstream Marvel title that's unashamedly aimed at a younger audience, but this also means that the humour gets really broad, while no amount of self-referential humour can banish the over-familiarity of the plot and set-up. Similar teen-friendly titles like *Gotham Academy* were outstanding, but so far *Strange Academy* is settling for good-natured, derivative fun that's unlikely to stick long in the memory. **Saxon Bullock**





SHADOW SERVICE

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Vault Comics

► Writer Cavan Scott

► Artist Corin M Howell

ISSUES 1-3 Bringing to mind urban fantasy novels like Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers Of London*, this intriguing mini-series about a clandestine government organisation battling supernatural threats explores some familiar territory, but has enough engagingly offbeat characters, twists and gross-out moments to draw you in.

Three issues into its 10-part run, Cavan Scott is still slowly setting out his stall, as main protagonist Gina Mayers still hasn't properly joined the ranks of Section 26, aka MI666. Resembling a mystical Jessica Jones, the incorrigible private detective doesn't have many friends beyond her talking pet rat Eddie. With flashbacks revealing how the sudden appearance of her supernatural abilities led to her being abandoned as a child, this incorrigible loner would be difficult to like if it weren't for her endearingly sardonic first-person narration.

Scott builds up an eclectic supporting cast including flesh-eating shapechanger Coyle, who tracks Gina via her puke, and MI666's pint-sized boss Hex. In a nod to Scott's various *Doctor Who* work, they operate out of a TARDIS-esque van, which is strikingly depicted by Corin M Howell. His fluid cartooning boasts a visceral edge, which is further enhanced by Triona Farrell's evocative colours. If you need something spooky to replace *Hellblazer*, this could be just the book. **Stephen Jewell**



THE DREAMING: WAKING HOURS

The Shakespeare Co-ed

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher DC Comics

► Writer G Willow Wilson

► Artist Nick Robles

ISSUES 1-3 The *Sandman* spinoff enters its next phase. It was always going to be hard following Si Spurrier and Bilquis Evelyn's 20-issue run on the title, but going by the first three issues of *Waking Hours*, G Willow Wilson and Nick Robles have nailed it.

Lindy is a single mother and a student writing her dissertation on Shakespeare. Most nights, when she dreams, she travels to a house. It's the same every time – until the night she meets Ruin, an errant nightmare. When the pair switch places, Lindy is trapped in the Dreaming and Ruin finds himself in the waking world, literally holding the baby.

Wilson's script subverts expectations at every stage. We've met nightmares before, but whereas the Corinthian delighted

in eating eyeballs, Ruin *hates* his role as a bringer of terror. As he's forced to team up with the angel Jophiel to find a way to save Lindy's life, the story takes on some of the odd couple dynamic of Crowley and Aziraphale from *Good Omens*.

Robles's art, meanwhile, dances nimbly between genres. For the most part he's going for a refined, elegant approach, but every so often he'll switch it up entirely. The scene where Daniel descends to meet the nightmares, for example, is positively feral.

Sure, you could make a convincing case that it's too stuffed with continuity to appeal much outside of *Sandman* fandom, but there's a real warmth and humour to *Waking Hours*. This is a fine continuation that also has something to say about being who you are, rather than who you're expected to be. **Will Salmon**

i Wilson had the idea of Ruin while going through a bout of insomnia, and musing that even bad dreams would be welcome.



ALIEN: THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Dark Horse Comics

► Writers Dan O'Bannon,

Cristiano Seixas

► Artist Guilherme Balbi

ISSUES 1-3 With the licence for *Alien* spin-off comics moving to Marvel in 2021, Dark Horse is ending its 32-year run on the franchise with a follow-up to its recent interpretation of William Gibson's unmade *Alien 3* script. This new five-issue mini-series adapts the original draft of *Alien* by writer Dan O'Bannon, back when it was called *Star Beast*, and way before Ridley Scott or any of the film's pioneering designers were involved.

The resulting comic ties its visuals purely to O'Bannon's descriptions in his screenplay, which means a very different look for the classic alien. While there are some narrative differences – most notably, the Facehugger eggs are found in an ancient pyramid, rather than the derelict ship – there's nothing in these first three issues as radically different as George Lucas's original drafts of *Star Wars*.

Instead, this plays as an intriguing *Elseworlds* version of the classic 1979 movie, with different characters but most of the same narrative beats, backed up by atmospheric art by Guilherme Balbi. There's less of the grittiness and a more traditional sci-fi tone, and it still feels like an early draft – but the mounting tension and central horror remain, so it's well worth seeking out. **Saxon Bullock**

STAR WARS: SQUADRONS

Dogfight Club



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 4/PSVR

► Also available on PC, Xbox One

► Publisher Activision

VIDEOGAME This *Star Wars*

shooter rarely reinvents the flight stick, but being wedged inside these famous cockpits blowing chunks out of rivals' ships *always* feels good.

While it can be played without a PS VR, it's inside Sony's virtual reality headset that *Squadrons* really comes alive. It's one of the few PS VR games to have a community online, as it shares its space with non-VR players too. For once, we get to play a VR shooter where waiting times are low and the net code is solid.

If you are in VR you have an advantage, as you can freely look

around and track other players, though this can take some getting used to as humans are less predictable than the game's AI.

Offline, *Squadrons* can feel overly simplistic, as you play through a campaign that swaps between the hotshot pilots in the remains of the Empire and the fledgeling New Republic; we're post-*Return Of The Jedi* here, and it all feels incredibly *Star Wars*.

It's by embracing this classic era that the game finds its voice. It's a celebration of the film's heart; as cameos come and go, you get a sense the developer really loves the source material. While the story is average and the dialogue stilted, when a TIE fighter sparks and spirals over your head before exploding, music soaring and your droid bleeping behind you, it just feels right.

You'll see the credits in around eight hours, which is why the game's online play is so vitally good – the best of which is Fleet Battles. Teams of players face off against one another's fleets. The aim is to take out the opponent's starfighters and raise your Morale to earn the right to attack their capital ships. At any moment the opposition can claw back Morale and turn the tables, allowing them to attack your fleet.

It's a tug-of-war that constantly surprises, demands team work, and is harder than a Death Star trench run. *Star Wars: Squadrons* manages to capture the spirit of *Star Wars* perfectly, and in PS VR literally puts you in an X-wing. What could be better? **Ian Dean**

i The voice clips heard on the PA in the New Republic hangar are the same ones used in 1999 game *X-Wing Alliance*.



DOCTOR WHO: THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY



► **RELEASED NOVEMBER**

► 55 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA The Eighth

Doctor's strand of the *Time Lord Victorious* event continues apace. The Dalek Time Squad (also featured in the *Daleks!* animation) are tracking a wave of temporal anomalies that are rewriting the history of the universe. Afraid of what this might mean for Dalek history, they capture the Doctor and force him to cooperate with them in an investigation. The uneasy alliance leads to the planet Wrax and an alien race which simply shouldn't exist...

The danger with Dalek-heavy stories, especially on audio, is how monotonous long passages of Skarosian dialogue can be. Kudos, then, to long-term "voice of the Daleks" Nicholas Briggs, who brings a real range of personalities to the individuals of the Time Squad, from the sinister, creeping Strategist (surely the Dominic Cummings of the Daleks) to the brutal Execution Unit. There's a real sense that the Doctor is outnumbered and on the back foot from the start.

The plot similarities to Titan's recent *Time Lord Victorious* comic, which also featured the Dalek Time Squad forcing an alliance on the Doctor, are a bit unfortunate, but this is the more assured tale. The Wraxians are far from the innocents that they initially appear to be, and Paul McGann's Doctor is as heroic as ever. **Will Salmon**

Insert your favourite *Star Wars* quote here.





IMAGINARY SOUNDTRACKS

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

49 minutes/44 minutes

Cassette/download

► Label Spun Out Of Control

ALBUMS The “soundtrack for an imaginary film” is old hat; making new music inspired by movies or novels is where it’s at for today’s solo musicians.

Rupert Lally has previously produced sets inspired by the likes of *Dune* and *The Day Of The Triffids*. **Where The Dark Speaks** ★★★★★ takes inspiration from 14 locations in Stephen King’s oeuvre, like *The Overlook Hotel* and *Derry*. Close your eyes and you can easily imagine these atmospheres accompanying establishing tracking shots. The same elements recur, though – *Tubular Bells*-ish piano figures; ominous synth; water sprinkler hi-hat – and there’s little in the way of development, beyond elements rising or falling in the mix.

Eight YouTube clips of *The Blair Witch Project* provided inspiration for Andy Fosberry’s **Blair, Maryland** ★★★★★. Using organic percussion to echo the historic roots of the Blair Witch myth was a wise move, and these pieces can be structurally more interesting, but a track like “The Same Log”, with its four-note descending pattern, seems pretty minimum-effort.

Five bonus tracks reimagining the cues using shimmering ’80s synths add very little. It’s a shame that this sort of exercise tends to have fairly generic results, far removed from anything as melodic or idiosyncratic as Morricone or Goblin. **Calvin Baxter**



RICHARD BAND

Empire Records

► **RELEASED 6 NOVEMBER**

56 minutes/38 minutes/45 minutes

Vinyl

► Label WRWTFWW Records

SOUNDTRACKS *Ghoulies*, *Troll* and *TerrorVision* are rarely to be found at the top of ’80s horror lists, but don’t let that put you off investigating this trio of soundtracks by Richard Band. A prolific and diverse composer, Band (brother of Charles, whose Empire Pictures distributed all three films) has a long history of bringing a touch of class to films that don’t always deserve it.

That’s certainly the case with 1984 *Gremlins* knockoff *Ghoulies* ★★★★★. Musically, this is pretty standard thriller fare – all rising strings, rumbling brass and ominous percussion – but it’s well done, and the main theme is suitably manic.

At its best, it leans towards Jerry Goldsmith’s all-time classic *Alien* score. The pink vinyl comes with an additional 7” of Fela Johnson’s electro-tinged “Dancing

With A Monster”, also featured in the film.

1986’s *Troll* ★★★★★ is an evocative mix of classical and choral music. The opening “Cantos 1” is especially lovely, sparkling with eerie magic. “Cantos Profanae”, on the other hand, is daft as a bat. Originally intended to be part of a full-blown musical sequence, it’s annoyingly earwormy: prepare to be singing “Herba-herba-way!” for the next month. The album is pressed to yellow vinyl.

Finally, the same year’s *TerrorVision* ★★★★★ comes on blue vinyl. It’s the most eclectic of the three albums, ranging from ’80s art rock and synth pop to goofy retro pastiches. The title track is the highlight: an ace cut of ’80s spook pop by The Fibonaccis. It’s one of five tracks here by the band, who never found fame, but who should appeal to fans of The B-52’s. **Will Salmon**

i Also out now (vinyl/CD/download, from Silva Screen): Colin Towns’s score for the 1986 Clive Barker horror *Rawhead Rex*.



CHILDREN OF THE STONES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

154 minutes (10 episodes) | Podcast

► Publisher BBC Sounds

AUDIO DRAMA **Modernising** a much-loved children’s classic is a tricky business, but Bafflegab Productions make a decent fist of this new take on the spooky ’70s TV series, set in a village whose standing stones have a malign influence on the locals.

Dialling up the *Wicker Man* vibes, Guy Adams and AK Benedict’s script has some good ideas when it comes to updating the tale. The central parent/child relationship, now between Mia (India Brown) and her dad (*Sightseers*’ Steve Oram) is much more fractious, and making Mia a Fortean podcaster is a reasonable solution to the eternal problem of justifying lots of describe-what-you-see. By leaning into the tale’s more gruesome aspects (human sacrifice), this version is also more likely to hook today’s kids, and the ending has greater clarity.

However, Reece Shearsmith goes overboard with the Child Catcher diction as astronomer Hendrick, here very clearly a crazed villain from the outset; fans of the original may find themselves pining for Ian Cuthbertson’s more avuncular tones. The constant trilling of “Happy day!” by Milbury’s brainwashed villagers gets a little repetitious. And sections where the psychic Mia experiences visions of the distant past can seem rather confused. But it’s a valid take, which surely works better for youthful listeners of 2020 than a slavish recreation. **Calvin Baxter**

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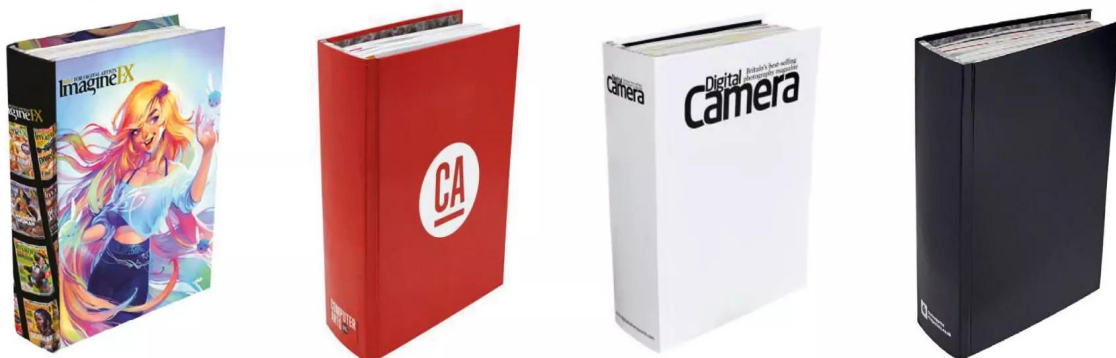
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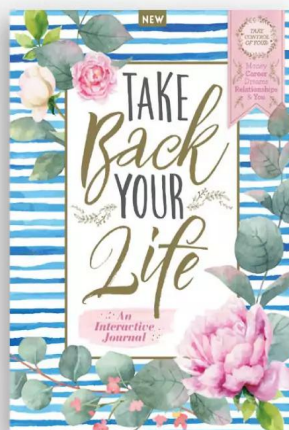
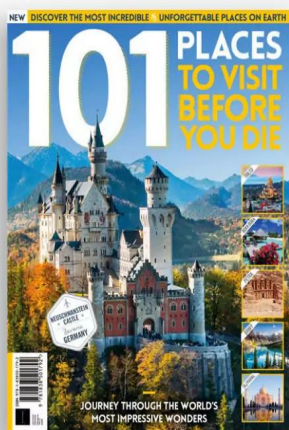
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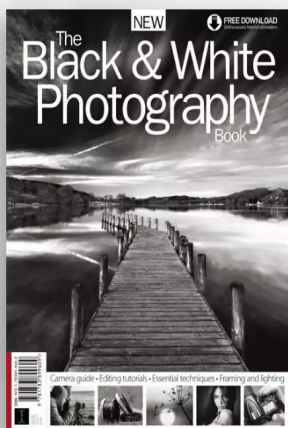
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Top score or not top score, that is the question, as we test your knowledge of the Bard's SF and fantasy connections

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

In which horror film are theatre critics murdered using methods inspired by Shakespeare's plays?

QUESTION 2

Name the William Shatner LP which includes recitations from *Henry V* and *Hamlet*.

QUESTION 3

Which Philip Pullman novel takes its name from a phrase in *Othello*?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this TV episode (and series).

QUESTION 5

What's the name of the young "savage" in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, who speaks largely in Shakespearean phrases?

QUESTION 6

Which 1956 movie is essentially an SF version of *The Tempest*?

QUESTION 7

Name the *Star Trek* episode about a Shakespearean actor who's actually a ruthless dictator.

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Name this film and the play from which it takes its title.

QUESTION 9

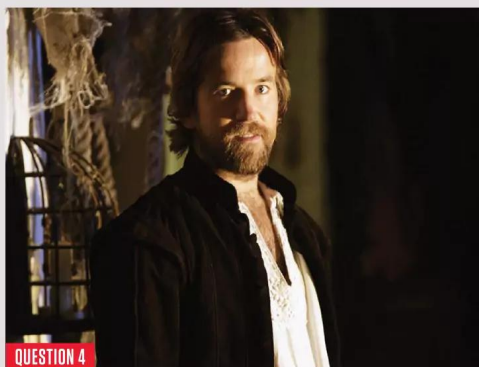
Which TV series features a parallel universe where *Wilma Shakespeare* is famous for plays like *The Taming Of The Shrimp*?

QUESTION 10

Which TV series had an episode called "The Bard", in which a screenwriter summons him up?

QUESTION 11 Picture Question

Identify this rather unusual take on *Romeo And Juliet*.



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 11



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 12

Which character claimed "You have not experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon"?

QUESTION 13

What do the Ray Bradbury novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, John Wyndham's *The Seeds Of Time*, and *Star Trek's* "Dagger Of The Mind" and "All Our Yesterdays" have in common?

QUESTION 14

In *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* "The Defector", which bridge officer acts out *Henry V*?

QUESTION 15

The SF novels *Ilium* and *Olympos* feature various characters from *The Tempest*. Who wrote them?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Which comic featured this performance of Shakespeare?

QUESTION 17

Which SF TV show has episodes titled "Once More Unto The Breach" and "The Dogs Of War"?

QUESTION 18

In what film does William Shatner perform a rap made up of lines from *Julius Caesar*?

QUESTION 19

Which animated riff on Shakespeare takes place in two gardens in Stratford Upon Avon?

QUESTION 20

Which alien species from *Doctor Who* are named after Caliban's mother from *The Tempest*?

1 Theatre Of Blood 2 "The Transformed Man" 3 Mortal Engines 4 Doctor Who, "The Shakespeare Code" 5 John 6 Forbidden Planet 7 "The Conscience Of The King" 8 What Dreams May Come/Hamlet 9 Red Dwarf 10 The Twilight Zone 11 Tromeo And Juliet 12 Chancellor Gorkon 13 Their titles are from Macbeth 14 Data 15 Dan Simmons 16 The Sandman 17 Star Trek: Deep Space Nine 18 Free Enterprise 19 Gnomeo And Juliet 20 The Sycorax

Answers

How did you do?

Which Shakespearean phrase are you?

0-5

Ignorant as dirt

6-10

The empty vessel

11-15

Made of sterner stuff

16-19

Spotless reputation

20

How like a god

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



G vs E



Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

Twenty years ago, one of the regular highlights of my week was heading round my mate's flat to watch TV. We'd start with VHSes of *Doctor Who* and *Buffy*. Three or four beers later, we'd be in a fit state to enjoy *G vs E*.

This short-lived series (latterly retitled *Good vs Evil*) ran for just 22 episodes (two, implausibly, scripted by *Battlestar Galactica*'s Ronald D Moore). The pitch: murdered reporter Chandler Smythe (Clayton Rohner) is resurrected as a member of The Corps, a secret organisation on the side of the angels. Their mission: to make "Faustians" – people who have signed away their soul for success – renounce their pact with the Devil. If a Faustian dies, they become a demonic, horned "Morlock". Thankfully, Corps agents are equipped with special daggers for killing those.

The brainchild of brothers Josh and Jonas Pate, the show began as a darker, more serious pilot titled *Underworld*, which evolved into something more tongue-in-cheek – thanks in part to the recasting which installed Richard Brooks as Chandler's partner Henry, an afro-ed John Shaft type (murdered in 1979) whose aura of cool is only slightly diminished by his choice of wheels: an ancient orange Volvo. Many of the duo's scenes together were heavily improvised. You can kind of tell.

Featuring copious amounts of split-screen and a soundtrack heavy with breakbeats, *G vs E* was clearly trying to inject some Quentin Tarantino cool into the genre. The show knew its audience, delivering lines like "In a hairdresser's, no one can hear you scream" and cult guest stars: one episode featured both Nichelle "Uhura" Nichols and *Starsky And Hutch*'s Antonio Fargas. Plot-wise, you could generally expect a string of absurdity. Take the third episode. Opening with Chandler waking up buried alive, it sees Henry falling into the clutches of a PVC-clad transvestite witch, and a prisoner handover going south after a superior accidentally activates the plastic explosives strapped to a Faustian. Who just happens to be a small boy.

The series hasn't aged very well. Its visual style now seems pretty cheesy, and an episode like "Men Are From Mars, Women Are Evil" – all about a serial killer murdering strippers – would (understandably) be met with howls of outrage if produced today. But there's still plenty about its irreverent approach to storytelling that chimes with me. I'd happily spend an evening back in the year 2000, reclining in an armchair as I crack open a can and wonder what latest nonsense the Pate Brothers have in store.

Ian fights to save lost souls against the minions of darkness.

ALAMY

Fact Attack!

→ Richard Brooks initially wore a wig for the series, having shaved his head for another role, but later grew his own afro.

→ Filming a scene where he stabbed a boot, Clayton Rohner ended up with a knife going right through his hand when it bounced off!

→ Jolene Blalock, Dominic Keating and John Billingsley – soon to become regulars on *Enterprise* – all had small roles in the series.

→ Richard Brooks went on to play bounty hunter Jubal Early in *Firefly*, while The Pate Brothers devised the equally short-lived *Surface*.

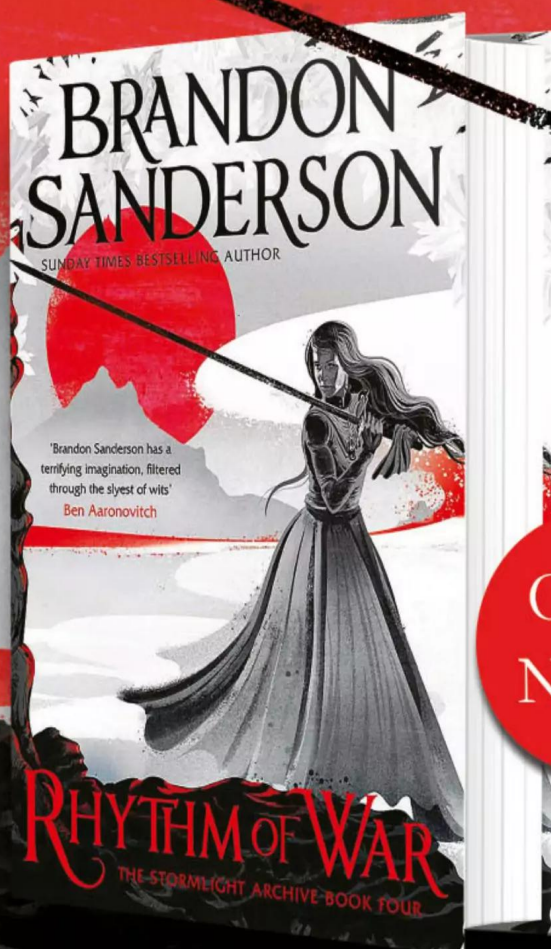
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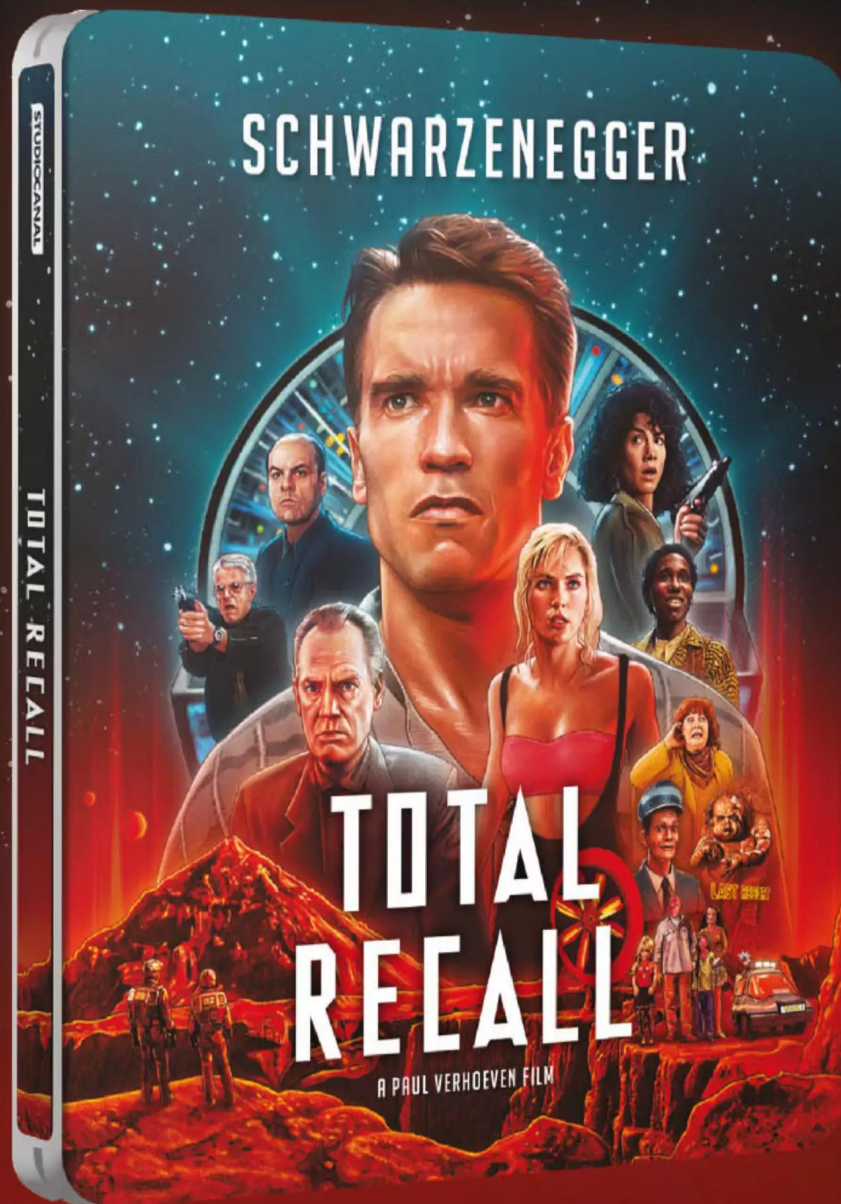
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